THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN

WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES, INDEXES, ETC., ETC.

By VARIOUS AUTHORS

In Twenty-One Volumes

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A HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOK OF

JUDGES

With Critical and Explanatory Notes, Several Hundred Outlines, many Suggestions and Comments, Indexes, etc.

BY THE
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PREFACE.

By Homiletic writing in these pages is not to be understood, an analysis of the thought contained in the text, for that properly is the province of exposition. Yet some critical examination of the exact truth intended to be conveyed, is needful as a foundation for this kind of writing, so that exposition may be regarded as the basis of homily. This want has been met in the present treatise by giving "Critical Notes," at the beginning of each chapter, sufficiently ample to bring out what is supposed to be the true interpretation. But Homiletic writing, properly so called, concerns itself with bringing out the practical bearings of the truth, after the meaning has been ascertained. It is nearly the same as *Applied Exposition*, and may be defined as the enunciation of the practical principles contained in the text, but its work is rather to eliminate those principles than to illustrate them. It opens up fountain-heads of truth, and leaves it to others to go along the course of the winding stream.

The writer of these pages, however, has not confined himself rigidly to this idea of homily, his object being rather to write a useful book, than to prepare one which might strictly square with the requirements of a logical definition. On the one hand, he was anxious to give the writing a living form, infusing into it the interest which naturally belongs to life in contrast with dry bones, and so he has endeavoured to put a little flesh and blood on the skeleton of homily. On the other, he has had in view what might be profitable to the popular class of readers, as well as to those who care for little more than the seeds of thought. Hence, he has intentionally studied to give some expansion to the principles enunciated, but not beyond the point of developing the seed into the bud. To carry it to the length of bringing out the full flower and the ripened fruit, is the work of sermonising. A mean between the dry seed and the full blossom, seemed to him a more useful mode of treatment, than if he had covered the page with a multitude of sapless roots, not yet cast into the soil, and without any savour or comeliness. Utility he regards as a more important aim, than conformity to a mechanical standard. But he has endeavoured to guard against any latitudinarian departure from the form of writing which the Book professes to give.

Another feature of this volume which the author thinks is due to himself to explain, is the multiplicity of divisions and subdivisions of thought which are given in certain parts, and especially in the earlier chapters. To this he was

led, in great measure, by finding that not a few regarded the Book of Judges as little else than a record of heroic history, without supplying any important principles for the guidance, and the fostering of the religious life. Being convinced that no part of the word of God was barren of good for the soul of man, he devoted himself to the purpose of showing that this Book, so far from being merely secular and wanting in spiritual instruction, was everywhere, even in the sentences and clauses, specially full of sacred principles and practical suggestions for the leading of a godly life. Hence he has dealt somewhat elaborately, with such subjects as *prayer*, the *operations of the Spirit of God*, and *sin*, in the many aspects here presented, showing that these might be entered on and fairly discussed in the Book of Judges, as well as any other book of the Old Testament.

That a considerable number of paragraphs are occupied with quotations from different authors, is not an arrangement of the author's choosing, but was one imposed on him by those who asked him to undertake the work. Yet, with the exception of these and any quotations that are so marked throughout the volume, it is scarcely necessary to say, that every sentence from beginning to end has been carefully thought out by himself, and expresses his own judgment on the matters recorded. He confesses his obligations to such authors, chiefly modern, or such works, as *Keil*, *Cassel*, *Lias*, *Rogers*, *Hengstenberg*, *Bush*, *Trapp*, *Auberlen*, *Scott*, *Saurin*, *Stanley*, *Adam Clarke*, *Dods*, *Wiseman*, *Patrick*, *Wordsworth*, *Jamieson*, *Josephus*, *Gibb*, *Luther*, *Henry*, *Fausset*, *Speaker's Commentary*, *Pulpit Commentary*, *Hall*, *Pictorial Bible*, and others—though venturing not infrequently to differ from them on some of the more important questions discussed, such as Ehud's conduct to Eglon, Jael's to Sisera, and Jephthah's to his daughter. He is of opinion, that much misinterpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures arises from overlooking the peculiar genius of the history there recorded, as differing from that of all other histories. It is the history of a people, who lead their life under the shadow of the covenant, and whose atmosphere and surroundings are all of a sacred character. They have special relations to the great Jehovah, so that everything has a colour and an emphasis, which belong to no other people. There are some other important principles which are too little regarded, but which really supply the true secret to the right understanding of a great portion of the Old Testament writings, such as the preserving of a well-balanced view of the God-ward and the man-ward sides of all that is there recorded; making the proper distinction also, between the Rectoral and the Fatherly character of God; and especially, noting the weight of the fact, that in Old Testament times, the great propitiation had not yet been made, so that God could not, consistently with what was due to His own holy name, act as the God of peace, but must as a rule, "give to every transgression and disobedience its just recompence of reward." Were these principles duly weighed, many difficulties of the Old Testament Scriptures might be brought nearer to a solution.

The author greatly regrets that this work has been prepared amid so many distracting thoughts, occasioned by his being constantly called away to attend to other duties; so that, if the reader should occasionally find a lack of symmetry, or a tendency to redundancy, he must crave his kind indulgence. He can only say in general, that in the getting up of this commentary, everything has been examined with the utmost care, as to accuracy of fact, suggestiveness of thought, suitableness of sentiment, as well as justness of interpretation. As to style, he leaves it to others to speak, but it may not be improper to say, that he, has studied clearness, freshness, force, and precision.

All imperfect as the offering is, the author, with trembling hand, now lays it on the altar to Him who, he believes, has suggested not a few of its words to his pen, if thereby a little moonlight be shed, on what has so long been regarded as a field less fruitful than most others in the great world of Bible truth, and a glimpse be got of its abounding fertility and unsearchable riches.

J. P. MILLAR.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

JUDGES.

INTRODUCTION.

The authorship of the book of Judges is **unknown.** It has been ascribed to Samuel, to Hezekiah, and to Ezra. Each of these names represents a mere conjecture, while the last two are at variance with the internal evidence of the book. Jewish tradition points to Samuel as the writer. Dr. Cassel, having regard to the office of historian, or recorder, in the royal household, set forth in such passages as 2 Sam. viii. 16, 1 Kings iv. 3, 2 Kings xviii. 18, 37, hazards the conjecture that the author may have been "a Benjaminite of the court of Saul." Gesenius says of this particular post, "A similar officer is mentioned in the royal court of Persia both anciently and in modern times, amongst whom he is called *Waka Nuwish*, and also in that of the Roman Emperors Arcadius and Honorius, and afterwards, bearing the name of *magistri memoriæ*."

The date of the book must be placed somewhere between the beginning of Saul's reign and the conquest of the Jebusites by David. It was obviously written a considerable time after Samson's victory at Lehi (xv. 19), and after the Israelites had become familiar with kingly rule (xvii. 6; xviii. 1; xix. 1; xxi. 25). On the other hand, it was apparently written before David had taken Jerusalem (i. 21; 2 Sam. v. 6–9). These considerations are set aside by some of the German writers, and in the article on "Judges" in Smith's Bib. Dict. The latter assumes that there were several authors, and a final author and editor after the Assyrian captivity, and then proceeds to state: "There is some doubt as to xviii. 30. It is thought by some to refer to the Philistine oppression. But it seems more probable that the Assyrian captivity is intended, in which case the writer must have lived after 721 B.C. *The whole book, therefore, must have taken its present shape after that date.*" Thus, a "doubtful" passage is considered sufficient for an unhesitating conclusion, and that notwithstanding other very weighty internal evidence to the contrary, and this easy process towards such a decision is all begun and ended within the space of a dozen lines. On the question of several authors, without which, of course, the verse chap. i. 21 must be held to be conclusive, Keil remarks: "The arguments adduced against the unity of authorship in all three parts, the introduction, the body of the work, and the appendices, will not bear examination. Without the introduction (chap. i. 1, iii. 6), the historical narrative contained in the book would want a foundation, which is absolutely necessary to make it intelligible; and the two appendices supply two supplements of the greatest importance in relation to the development of the tribes of Israel in the time of the Judges, and most intimately connected with the design and plan of the rest of the

book. . . . All these portions are just as rich in allusions to the Mosaic law and the legal worship as the other parts of the book, so that both in their contents and their form they would be unintelligible apart from the supremacy of the law in Israel. The discrepancies which some fancy they have discovered between chap. i. 8 and chap. i. 21, and also between chap. i. 19 and chap. iii. 3, vanish completely on a correct interpretation of the passages themselves. And no such differences can be pointed out in language or style as would overthrow the unity of authorship or even render it questionable." In addition to this, the phrase "until the day of the captivity of the land," in chap. xviii. 30, is far more satisfactorily explained by the successive victories of the Philistines, culminating in the great overthrow at Ebenezer, than it is by referring it to the great captivity in Assyria. A few considerations will make this apparent.

1. The next verse, chap. xviii. 31, limits the 30th verse to "the time that the house of God was in Shiloh," till which day only the sons of Jonathan ministered before Micah's graven image.

2. If the time of the Assyrian captivity is meant, this gross idolatry at the city of Dan must have been carried on in defiance of all Israel, at least in the time of David. The completeness of David's dominion in Israel, and his hatred of idolatry, alone render this supposition an utterly untenable contradiction. Besides, if Micahism lasted for nearly 700 years, and these sons of Jonathan remained ceaselessly its priests, it is reasonable to ask, How is it that during those seven centuries we never again hear of either it or them? True, the Speaker's Commentary intimates that we do hear of the men again in 1 Kings xii. 31, in the phrase "the priests which were not of the sons of Levi." But this is in spite of the statement that Jeroboam "*made*" these very priests "of the lowest of the people;" and on this verse in Kings, so far from venturing to renew its statement made on Judg. xviii. 30, the commentary forgets itself, and says: "As Levites were not to be had, Jeroboam set up his *new order of priests, taken indifferently from all the tribes.*" This is very unlike "the sons of Jonathan," who in the passage on Judges are made to seem "priests of the worship of the golden calf which Jeroboam established at Dan."

The supposition, made alone from these two verses (xviii. 30, 31), that after the removal of the ark from Shiloh the sons of Jonathan became priests of some new form of idolatry, instead of Micahism, is too forced and unnatural to be admitted. It is obviously suggested merely as a means of finding employment for these continuous priests, and is so entirely foreign to anything which the verses say that it can only be regarded as an entirely unfounded and to some extent contradictory conjecture. As Du Pin long since remarked, "The priests which the Danites made were the priests of Micah's idol. They lasted no longer than their image did, and their priesthood ended with it."

3. The whole of the main narrative in the book of Judges tends to offer a sufficient explanation of the phrase, "the captivity of the land," and Scripture phraseology elsewhere (cf. Ps. lxxviii. 61) is in harmony with treating the domination of the Philistines as the period to which reference is made. The Hebrew, עַד־יוֹם גְּלוֹת הָאָרֶץ (*'ad yôm g'lôth hâ-'ârets*), means literally, "Until the day of the exile of the land." But, as Dr. Cassel has excellently argued, this is an expression which cannot be interpreted literally, and is sufficiently unnatural to have suggested to many a transcriber's error. Consequently Kimchi, and other Jewish authorities, long since proposed to read הָאָרוֹן (*hâ-'ârôn*), "the ark," that is, the ark of the Covenant, instead of הָאָרֶץ (*hâ-'ârets*), a reading supported by Houbigant and even Ewald. But, in any case, the expression must be interpreted in more or less of a figurative sense, and may well be allowed to refer to the captivity of the ark, and thus of all Israel, even as it stands in the text.

The chronology of the period embraced by the various Judges is very uncertain. The following table by Professor Keil is thought by many to present one of the best approximate views of this question.

PRINCIPAL EVENTS FROM THE EXODUS TO THE BUILDING OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE.

EVENTS.	Years of Duration.	Date B.C.
The Exodus from Egypt	...	1492
The Law given at Sinai	...	1492–1491
Death of Aaron and Moses, after the Exodus	40	1453
Conquest of Canaan by Joshua	7	1452–1445
Division of the land to the invasion by Cushan-Rishathaim	10	1445–1435
Death of Joshua, about B.C. 1442		
Wars against the Canaanites, from B.C. 1442 onwards		
War of the tribes with Benjamin, about B.C. 1436		
Oppression by Cushan-Rishathaim	8	1435–1427
Deliverance by Othniel, and rest	40	1427–1387
Oppression by the Moabites	18	1387–1369
Deliverance by Ehud, and rest	80	1369–1289
Shamgar's victory over Philistines		
Oppression by Jabin	20	1289–1269
Deliverance by Deborah and Barak, and rest	40	1269–1229
Oppression by the Midianites	7	1229–1222
Deliverance by Gideon, and rest	40	1222–1182
Rule of Abimelech	3	1182–1179
Tola, judge	23	1179–1156
Jair, judge (coinciding with first 20 years of Eli)	22	1156–1134
SYNCHRONOUS EVENTS.		
IN THE EAST. / **IN THE WEST.**		
Ammonite oppression, 18 years; from 1134 to 1116 B.C. / Philistine oppression	40	1134–1094
/ Last 20 years of Eli		1134–1114
Jephthah, judge 6 years; from 1116 to 1110 B.C. / First 20 years of Samuel		1114–1094
/ Samson's deeds		1116–1096
Ibzan, judge 7 years; from 1110 to 1103 B.C. / Defeat of the Philistines		1094
/ Samuel, judge	19	1094–1075
Elon, judge 10 years; from 1103 to 1093 B.C. / Saul, king	20	1075–1055
/ David, king at Hebron	7	1055–1048
Abdon, judge 8 years; from 1093 to 1085 B.C. / David, king at Jerusalem	33	1048–1015
/ Solomon, to the building of the Temple	3	1015–1012
Total	480 years.	

With this table compare Judg. xi. 26; 1 Sam. viii. 1, xii. 2; 1 King vi. 1; Acts xiii. 20.

The short period assigned by the table from the time of the division of the land to the invasion by Cushan-Rishathaim seems, however, inadmissible, notwithstanding the arguments to the contrary of Professors Bachmann and Bliss. As has been frequently pointed out, this short term of ten years would require Joshua to have been one hundred years old at the time of the conquest of the land, it would leave too little room for Josh. xxiii. 1; it would allow no sufficient space to answer to the expression, "Israel served the Lord all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua" (Josh. xxiv. 31, Judg. ii. 7), nor would it allow any time for the decline of piety as noted in Judg. iii. 7, 8. The time allowed for the administration of Samuel and Saul also appears to be insufficient.

The plan of the book may stand thus:—Preface, chaps. i.–iii. 4; History of the Judges, chaps. iii. 5—xvi.; Supplementary Narratives: (*a*) The story of Micah and the Danite expedition, chaps. xvii., xviii.; (*b*) the story of the Levite and the overthrow of the Benjaminites, chaps. xix.–xxi.; (*c*) the story of Ruth, which in ancient copies of the Hebrew text was always included in this book. Of the separate parts of the book as it now stands, only the first needs attention here. What is the true relation of the preface, or introduction, to the book of Joshua which precedes it, and to that of the Judges which follows?

The object of the preface is, mainly, a threefold one. (*a*) We are reminded in chap. i. 1 that "after the death of Joshua" there still remained "very much land to be possessed." This agrees with Josh. xiv. 1, and the subsequently peaceful years of Joshua's life. (*b*) We are told of the backwardness of the Israelites to cast out the Canaanites, as God had commanded (chap i. 21, 27—36). To this *general* backwardness of the people to do the will of the Lord there were at first three honourable exceptions. Judah, and Simeon, and Joseph endeavoured to complete their conquests (chaps. i. 3–7, 17–20, 22–25), and it is specially noticed that "Jehovah was with" these men in their early endeavours to be faithful (chap. i. 4, 22). In noticing the *appointed* military mission of Judah (chap. i. 2), a long parenthesis is used to tell us of the *honourable place which Judah had already occupied in the previous war, under Joshua.* This parenthesis extends, inclusively, from ver. 8 to ver. 16 of chap. i. In it, a retrospect is purposely taken of Judah's conspicuous prowess in the past conflicts, and especially those of Judah's great leader, the faithful Caleb. But for all this past prowess, and though "the Lord was with Judah" as long as Judah faithfully trusted and fought, yet even Judah became timid, and unbelieving, and inert before the chariots of iron possessed by the dwellers in the valley. (*c*) The third main object of this preface is to show us that out of the general backwardness and unbelief of the tribes in casting out the Canaanites, there grew up a sinful spirit in other matters also. Failing to do God's will, the people began to have no regard to God. They served other gods (chaps. ii. 11–23; iii. 1–4). At the point where the Lord's chastisement by Chusan-Rishathaim overtook the Israelites, they had actually begun to marry the Canaanites (iii. 5–7). Thus the author of the book shows us, in these first two chapters, the circumstances which gradually led to Jehovah's chastisements, and to the raising up of the various Judges of deliverance, of whose exploits the book gives an account. In the second chapter, even as in the first, there is a long parenthesis. After the words of Jehovah's rebuke at Bochim, the author, in a passage extending from ver. 6 to ver. 10, reminds us that *there had been no such need for God's rebuke and Israel's tears in the days of Joshua, nor even in the days of the Elders.* These two parentheses—one in either chapter—and the object for which they are inserted, should be distinctly kept in mind if we would not have both chapters a maze of involved statements and of inextricable confusion. Read in the light suggested, they become a valuable and necessary introduction to the understanding of the main narrative. For want of some clearer apprehension of the purpose of the author of this book, Lord Arthur Hervey, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, in the Speaker's Commentary, has written a laboured and confused note of great length, in which he assumes, as a matter of course, that the Gilgal of chap. ii. 1 was the Gilgal near Jericho, rather than Jiljilia, "in the plains of Moreh," and very near to Shiloh; and in which, mainly from this assumption, and from neglecting the two parentheses, he concludes that "the events in chaps i. and ii. 1–6 *all* belong to Joshua's lifetime," and assigns the transaction at Bochim "*to the early part* of Joshua's government," notwithstanding the contradiction which ii. 2 would then offer to ii. 7. The note, moreover, closes with the somewhat curious suggestion that chap. i. 1 "might have originally begun, '*Now after the death of* MOSES.'"

The spirit and purpose of the book demand, also, a short notice. With a series of historial records that deal with the sin and degradation of men in very extreme forms, the moral influence and spiritual teaching of the book are no less Divine than the Scriptures elsewhere. All through, the voice that speaks to the generations following, is the voice of God. Four things are especially worthy of notice:—(*a*) *God's determinate repression of sin in His own people, even as in others.* From the warning at Bochim, to the beginning of the Lord's chastisement by Cushan-Rishathaim, and on to the end of the narrative recording the punishment of Benjamin, we are made to see that the Lord's people can no more sin with impunity than Canaanites themselves. (*b*) *God's merciful forgiveness of men when they repent of sin.* This is emphatically set forth in many conspicuous instances. In fact, the book is one continued panorama, in which man's sin, God's chastisement, man's penitence and God's pardon, are ever passing before our eyes. (*c*) *God's gracious condescension towards men who live in dark and ignorant times.* Nothing is more beautiful, all through the book, than the way in which the Divine love and mercy stoop to man's very low condition. The Angel of the Covenant, long before He becomes incarnate and speaks to us as in Luke x. 30–37, is here also the "Good Samaritan," ever yearning to help the wounded, and ever coming to them *where they are.* (*d*) Finally, we see here *the gradual furtherance of God's purpose, notwithstanding man's unfaithfulness and sin.* The misery of the people under the rule of the Judges presently made way for the kings, who had been long before predicted (Deut. xvii. 14, 15); the kings, among others, contained David, "the man after God's own heart," while under their various reigns prophets predicted the coming of "the Son of David." Then the monarchy in its turn failed, the people were carried into and brought back from the Assyrian captivity, the prophets died, and in the great silence and desolation and sorrow which forthwith settled upon the once favoured land, the world found its fittest preparation for the advent of its only true Saviour and for the final government and reign of its everlasting Lord and King. Thus, amid the very ruins wrought by man's sin, Divine grace finds its opportunity to lay the foundations of the kingdom that has no end.

CHAPTER I.

FAITHFULNESS AND UNFAITHFULNESS IN THE LORD'S WAR.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. **Now after the death of Joshua.**] The Speaker's Commentary says on these opening words: "But from i. 1 to ii. 9 is a consecutive narrative, *ending* with the death of Joshua. It is therefore impossible that it should *begin* with the death of Joshua." This is obviously incorrect. "A consecutive narrative" is precisely what these two chapters are *not;* they are a narrative containing two long parentheses (cf. Introduction.) It is not necessary to offer any remark on the suggestion of the Commentary that, under certain circumstances, "the chapter might have begun, *Now after the death of Moses;*" and that, "If *Moses* is read instead of *Joshua*, all difficulty disappears at once." This, in the face of chap. ii. 2 and ii. 7, is unanswerable from its innocence. 2. **Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites?**] *Heb.* = "Who shall go up for us *to* the Canaanites?" the purpose of the going up being stated in the words, "to fight against them." "The reason why Judah was to commence the hostilities is not to be sought for in the fact that Judah was the most numerous of all the tribes, but rather in the fact that Judah had already been appointed by the blessing of Jacob (Gen. xlix. 8–10) to be the champion of his brethren." [*Keil.*] 8. **Come up with me into my lot.**] This invitation must have been given to Simeon while the tribe of Judah was located in its own lot, though not in full possession of it. It is unnatural to suppose with Professor Cassel that when Judah gave this invitation to Simeon both tribes were dwelling at Gilgal, near Jericho, and that the Canaanites were in full possession of the territory assigned to Judah and Simeon. This would be to conclude that Joshua's conquest of the south had almost entirely failed, and that during Joshua's own lifetime, and is altogether at variance with Josh. xv. 13–19, 63, xviii. 1, xxi. 43–45, xxii. 4, xxiii. 1, xxiv. 28, and, indeed, to the whole of the latter half of that book.

The request for Simeon to aid in conquering the Canaanites in the lot of Judah, made under the promise that Judah would similarly assist the tribe of Simeon in their lot, shows that the men of Judah were only appointed to recommence hostilities on their own account. Thus, the phrase, "*for us*," in ver. 1, must not be taken to mean that the Judahites were to make war on behalf of all the tribes, but that, after the death of Joshua, they were to begin, in their own tribe, to fulfil the commands of the Lord, and thus set an example of faithfulness to all Israel. **4. The Perizzites.**] The Canaanites and Perizzites are occasionally put for all the inhabitants of the land, and the latter are spoken of, not simply as dwellers in the South, as here, but in all parts of the land (Gen. xiii. 7, xxxiv. 30; Josh. xi. 3, xvii. 15.) Dr. Kalisch says, "The etymology of the word 'Perizzite' proves that they were the inhabitants of *open towns and villages* (פְּרָזוֹת *p'rázoth*); it is clearly explained by Ezek. xxxviii. 11 to denote the population of places 'without walls and bars and gates;' and it is, in Esther ix. 19, used for the unfenced cities, in contradistinction to the metropolis named in ver. 18. The two names of the Canaanites and Perizzites, if so coupled, designate, therefore, both the inhabitants of the walled towns and of the open country; and describe, with a certain emphasis, the two chief portions of the population." **In Bezek.**] "According to the Onomast, there were at that time two places very near together both named Bezek, seventeen Roman miles from Neapolis on the road to Scythopolis, *i.e.*, about seven hours to the north of Nabulus on the road to Beisan. This description is perfectly reconcilable with 1 Sam. xi. 8." [*Keil.*] **8. Now the children of Judah had fought, &c.**] *Heb.* = "*fought*," the pluperfect form not being given in the original. Still, the sense is, "*they formerly fought*," "*they had fought*." A similar use of the past for the pluperfect has been noticed under Josh. viii. 12. For the time when Judah had fought against Jerusalem we may refer to Josh. xii. 8, 10, when, though the king was slain, the strongholds of the city were not fully possessed (Josh. xv. 63). As Mr. Groser observes, "It is inconsistent to suppose that Adoni-bezek was carried into a city which his captors had just taken and set on fire." This eighth verse begins a parenthesis which extends to the close of ver. 16. The main object of the parenthesis is to show the conspicuous valour and fidelity which Judah, whom the Lord had just chosen (ver. 2), had already displayed in previous conflicts. The reference to Jerusalem in the close of ver. 7, naturally suggests the beginning of the parenthesis as in ver. 8. After the parenthetic account of Judah's faithful courage at Jerusalem and Hebron, and after the author's record that the children of the Kenite had settled in the wilderness of Judah, the history of the expedition of Judah and Simeon is resumed. This explanation gives a perfect sense, and in no way disturbs the record in the book of Joshua. Peter Martyr and Richard Rogers long since contended for this parenthesis as the correct exposition of the local value of the several verses. **9—15. And afterward, &c.**] Cf. on Josh. xv. 14–19. **16. The children of the Kenite.**] The Kenites are first mentioned in Gen. xv. 19. They were either a tribe of Midianites, or a people who, having long before the Exodus settled in the land of Midian, had established themselves there in some strength. Exod. ii. 16 may mean that Reuel, or Jethro, was only a prince or priest of Kenites who had settled in the land of Midian; or he and his people may have been descendants of Abraham by Keturah, and thus a branch of the Midianites themselves. Numb. x. 29 favours the latter conjecture, Reuel being distinctly called "the Midianite." **In the time of Barak, a branch of these Kenites are found as settlers near Kedesh-Naphtali, by the Lake of Merom, or *el Hûleh*. 17. And Judah went with Simeon.**]

The history is here resumed, after the digression (vers. 8–16). **Zephath or Hormah.**] The latter name, meaning "*a devoting*," was evidently given to Zephath on account of the ban of destruction, for the second time executed here (cf. Numb. xxi. 1–3, and Com. on Josh. xii. 14). The LXX. have Ἀνάθεμα. "Now *Sebaita*, a large deserted town situated in a large plain at the foot of the *Magrâh* mountains, and not far from the head of the *Wady el Abaydh*. Five miles off is an old fort, on a steep hill. Perhaps this is the 'watch-tower' from which the place derived its name. This discovery was made by Professor Palmer and the late Mr. Tyrwhitt Drake." [*Groser.*] **18. Gaza. . . Askelon. . . Ekron.**] Cf. on Josh. xi. 22, xiii. 3. After the conquest of these places by Joshua, they appear to have been re-occupied by the Canaanites. This is specially said of Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod, even in the time of Joshua (Josh. xi. 22). After events and statements show that the present subjugation was as imperfect as the former (Judg. xiv. 19, xvi. 2, &c.). **19. Could not drive out.**] They were "*not to be driven out*." "The expression לֹא יָכְלוּ (*lo yâch'lu*), '*they could not*,' is purposely avoided. They would have been quite able when God was with them; but when it came to a contest with iron chariots their faith failed them." [*Cassel.*] **The inhabitants of the valley.**] הָעֵמֶק, not הַשְּׁפֵלָה, as in ver. 9 of this chapter. "*Emek* is not applied to ravines, but to the long broad sweeps sometimes found between parallel ranges of hills." [*Dean Stanley.*] Thus "the valley" would be suitable for the use of the chariots. **20. And they gave Hebron unto Caleb.**] This is repeated for the same purpose as the repetition in the parenthesis (vers. 8–16), namely, to show Judah's general faithfulness towards God and Israel. This faithfulness in fulfilling the Lord's words, is given as an explanation of the Lord's choice in ver. 2,—"Judah shall go up." **21. Unto this day.**] Therefore this book was written before the expulsion of the Jebusites by David (but cf. Introduction). "Jerusalem was a border city. **In Josh. xv. 63 we read that**

the Judahites did not expel the Jebusites from the upper city, or Zion; here we are told that the warlike Benjaminites failed to do so. There is no need to suppose an alteration in the text. This shows that ver. 8 records only the capture of the lower city." [*Groser.*] 28. The name of the city before was Luz.] Cf. on Josh. xvi. 2, Preacher's Commentary, pp. 267, 270. In these verses it is shown that the children of Joseph also, like those of Judah, *began*, after the death of Joshua, faithfully to execute the word of the Lord. But vers. 27–29 tell us that this fidelity was only very partial. They soon ceased to obey Jehovah, and "put the Canaanites to tribute." 27–29. Neither did Manasseh, &c.] The condition of unbelieving inactivity noticed of Manasseh in Josh. xvii. 11-13, and of Ephraim in Josh. xvi. 10, is here shown to have continued to the time of the opening of the history in the book of Judges. Thus the latter part of this chapter does something more than show "the identity of the transactions referred to" in the book of Joshua. It shows that *the want of* faithful and vigorous transactions noticed there, remained to be noticed several years later. It is precisely this perpetuated inaction which leads to the further sins and the subsequent calamities of which the book of Judges gives the history. It is in this light that chaps. i. and ii. become a very pertinent introduction to the whole of this book. 34. Forced the children of Dan into the mountain.] Probably with the iron chariots with which they were able to command the valley or more level ground adjacent to the mountains. Thus were the Danites straitened for room, and presently led to seek more territory, as stated in chap. xviii. 35. In Mount Heres.] *Lit.*, "*The mountain of the sun*," or "*the arid mountain*." Probably so named in connection with sun-worship, and the same as, or adjacent to, Ir-Shemesh, "*city of the sun*," which occurs in the parallel passage, Josh. xix. 41, and called Beth-shemesh, "*house of the sun*," in Josh. xv. 10, 1 Kings iv. 9. It may be the modern *Ain-Shems*, about seven miles from Ekron, though this seems too far south for the hand of the house of Joseph to have been heavy upon the Amorites there, gradually making them tributary. The LXX. curiously render the first part of the verse, "And the Amorite began to dwell in the mountains of shells, in which are bears and foxes." 36. From the going up to Akrabbim. Cf. Numb. xxxiv. 4, and remarks on Josh. xv. 3. Some place Akrabbim ten miles due south of the Dead Sea, and others at the Pass *es-Sufah*, somewhat more west. From the rock and upward.] "'From the rock' cannot be understood as relating to the city of Petra, but must denote some other locality well known to the Israelites by that name. Such a locality there undoubtedly was in the rock in the desert of Zin, which had become celebrated through the events that took place at the Water of Strife (Numb. xx. 8, 10), and to which, in all probability, this expression refers. The rock in question was at the south-west corner of Canaan, on the southern edge of the *Rakhma* plateau, to which the mountains of the Amorites extended on the south-west (cf. Numb. xiv. 25, 44, 45, with Deut. i. 44)." [*Keil.*] A line from the two points thus described is here said to have formed, probably, the *original* southern boundary of the Amorite kingdom.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–4.

Dead Leaders and Living Duties.

One generation passeth away and another followeth. The book of Joshua began with, "Now after the death of Moses." This book opens with the similar words, "Now after the death of Joshua." Human life is a succession of revolutions, beginning with a cradle and ending with a coffin. Generations and individuals have in them, in their relation to other generations and individuals, much of variety, but something also of monotony. We see in these opening verses—

I. A great leader dead, and life's duties as pressing as ever. Joshua had departed from Israel, but the necessity for conflict was still with them. Of that the people now made no question whatever. As Peter Martyr observes, "They doubted not whether they should make war against the Canaanites, but their doubt was which tribe should fight before all the others." That the fighting must be done was sufficiently manifest to everybody. Possibly the death of Joshua at once made that more manifest than it had been for some time, the death of Israel's mighty captain encouraging their enemies to bestir themselves. 1. *Let who will and what will pass away, our own work only passes with our own life.* Joshua himself had diligently laboured to the very last. After resting from war, he had divided the land; after dividing the land, he built his own city of Timnath-serah, and appointed the cities of refuge and those of the Levites; while the very close of life finds him twice gathering

together and earnestly counselling the people of his charge. "The night cometh when no man can work;" till it come, no one should look to rest from what he has strength to perform. In God's army there are no retired officers, and none on half-pay. He who is too "old and stricken in years" to fight as he fought when younger may still find some city to build, and some of his fellows who are less experienced than himself to whom he can offer holy encouragement and counsel. He who began by saying, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business," never ceased to prosecute that business till He laid down His life upon the cross. 2. *The advancement of God's purpose is dependent on no life in particular.* Though the great leader of Israel was no more, the conquest of the land must still go forward. Just as the advance of the people was not formerly stayed by the death of Moses, so they were not to be kept back now by the death of Joshua. Only God is necessary. There is no man who cannot be spared when God's time comes for his removal. 3. *Great lives are sometimes removed that other lives may better feel their responsibility and cultivate their strength.* Children cannot always have their parents, without the penalty of always remaining children. He who is always led will never learn to lead. It had already been said of Jacob: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." He who fears he may fall is in a fair way to learn how to stand.

II. Human direction suddenly failing, and Divine guidance specially sought. "After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel asked the Lord." 1. *Prayer prompted by the removal of long familiar light.* Joshua had been the Lord's guide and helper for the people. A consciousness of increasing darkness around us, or within us, should ever prompt us to come as near as possible to Him who is the Light of the world. 2. *Prayer over unfulfilled commandments.* The charge to cast out the Canaanites, and to make no alliance with them, had been very solemnly given by God. As long as Joshua was alive, he was the responsible head of the people. When Joshua was removed, the commandment forthwith became so much direct obligation resting upon every Israelite. Thus burdened, the people drew near unto God for counsel. Corporate duties are a matter for individual concern and supplication. That which is a national obligation affects also every citizen. A commandment of God fulfilled in humble obedience, is as a field sown with good seed, which will presently yield a harvest of blessing; a commandment unfulfilled, is ever tending to bring forth fruit unto our discomfort, and sickness, and death. He who neglects the Divine precepts is in sore need of prayer. 3. *Prayer provoked by gathering dangers.* The death of Joshua was very probably the sign for increased activity among the Canaanites. Adonibezek had evidently gathered a large army, or he could not have lost in one battle ten thousand men. 4. *Prayer for God's appointment of our post in life.* "Who shall go up?" An appeal to God to assign the post of honour to whom He would. With some, it may have been an appeal to God in the hope of not being chosen. He whom God exalts should wear his honours meekly. He whom God calls to battle should enter into conflict without fear. 5. *The realism of prayer to every true-hearted suppliant.* It was no light thing to ask this counsel of God, and then wait for a categorical and manifest answer. All true prayer wants real courage. When a man *knows* God will answer, it is no light thing to pray. The man may be sent to the battle-field. He may be deprived of a great honour, or be charged with an arduous duty. Many engage in what they call prayer, who would not dare to come before God if they believed that He would audibly or visibly impose His commands upon them. It is because they never expect any answer that myriads are bold to pray.

III. An eminently faithful past demanding a no less vigorous future. "Judah

shall go up." As the verses 8–16 show, the Judahites had already played a conspicuous part in those more detached conflicts which, after the great national battles, had fallen to the separate tribes. They had taken the lower city of Jerusalem (cf. chap. i. 8 with i. 21, and Josh. xii. 10), and under the lead of Caleb and Othniel, Hebron and Kirjath-sepher had both fallen before their attack. He who has done well in the past is under perpetual obligation to do no less well in the future. God also chooses those for new duties who have best served in the past.

IV. God specially choosing some of His servants, but leaving them liberty to seek the help of others. "And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot." 1. *The benefits of co-operation.* What one cannot do, two can. What one can only do with difficulty, two can do easily. No one should despise the assistance of his brethren. He who accepts assistance should be willing to assist others: "I likewise will go with thee into thy lot." This mutual help one of another becomes strength and joy to both. 2. *The limits of co-operation.* Judah might only seek aid from his own brethren. He might ask help from Simeon, but not from idolaters. God allows us to unite with all who are our brethren in Him, but He will suffer no union with the ungodly. For nothing more sharply than for this were the Israelites rebuked in the time of the monarchy.

V. The Lord's call to great duties followed by His rich blessing on those who seek faithfully to perform them. "The Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand." 1. *God calls and sends none of His servants in vain.* To be set to work by Him, is to be set to work which will be presently fruitful of enlarged possessions and greater peace. 2. *God's blessing answers to His own promise of blessing.* To the man who is faithful, the Divine promise is the shadow which the actual mercy, in its coming to us, casts before. Thus, the words of promise in ver. 2, herald the same words, as history, in ver. 4. 3. *God's blessing satisfies His people's highest hopes.* If this was so with Judah in his earthly possession, much more will it be true in relation to the inheritance above.

OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

THREATENED DANGER AND ANXIOUS PRAYER.—*Verses* 1, 2.

It is thought that the Canaanites were, at this time, preparing to act on the offensive against the Israelites. From vers. 4–7, it would appear that large numbers of warriors had again ventured to mass themselves together. Probably Adoni-bezek was gathering his forces to attack the southern tribes of the recent conquerors of the land. Regarded in this light, the verses may be treated as follows:—

I. The Lord's enemies threatening the Lord's people. 1. *The Canaanites may have judged Israel's strength by outward appearances.* Joshua was now dead. The able soldier could act against them no more. But they forgot Joshua's God. Then, the Canaanites had long been allowed to rest in peace. Probably they learned to interpret this interval of peace as a sign of Israel's weakness. Jehovah had not recently done many mighty works. They mistook the visible for the actual. Thousands do that every day that passes. 2. *The Canaanites seem to have been tempted to renew the war by Israel's apparent weakness.* The time of the weakness of the Church is the time of the world's boldness. But wicked men should remember the God of the Church: "These things hast thou done and I kept silence," says Jehovah. He adds, "But I will reprove thee." The silence of Jehovah is not any sign of His weakness.

II. The Lord's people driven to

prayer by danger. "Israel asked of the Lord." The removal of Joshua, and the bold front of their enemies, made them ask counsel of God. His prayer has the following features:— 1. *It recognised the necessity of human effort.* "Who shall go up?" Some one must go. God will not so work as to save us from conflict; He thinks it enough to turn our conflict into victory. 2. *It was a simple and direct prayer.* It had no redundancies and "vain repetitions." Men in deep want seldom use superfluous sentences and phrases. The eloquence of prayer is in its sense of need, and in its directness. 3. *This prayer was based on a known command.* There was no inquiry as to the work being a duty, but only as to the manner in which the duty was to be done. 4. *The prayer manifestly anticipates some answer.* The words of the inquiry leave no impression that the suppliants so much as thought of a refusal. They had no idea that God would be silent. Their brief and urgent question is full of the faith pressed upon the Hebrews of a later generation: "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

III. The Lord's gracious answer to His people's earnest inquiry. 1. *The answer was prompt.* It seems to have been given at once. 2. *The answer was clear.* It left no one in doubt. "Judah shall go up." 3. *The answer was in excess of the prayer.* The people did but ask, "Who shall go?" God both answered that, and gave them a gracious promise of success: "Behold, I have delivered the land into his hand." 4. *The answer was sufficient.* In the strength of God's gracious words, Judah and Simeon went on to victory.

"God, Who Giveth to All Men Liberally."—*Verse* 2.

I. God gives to all who ask.

II. God promises more than we ask.

III. God gives fully as much as He promises.

IV. God both promises and gives according to our need.

Enticements to Prayer.

"God gives more than is asked, or thought needful. The which dealing of His doth add yet greater heartening and encouraging of us to prayer. Joseph, whose feet were pinned in the stocks, prayed that he might be delivered out of prison; and God not only delivered him, but brought him out with great honour. Esther prayed against the spiteful attempt of Haman, that she and her people might be preserved from the deadly snare which be laid for their lives. But what did the Lord? He not only saved them, but utterly destroyed both Haman and all his seed. So, when the prodigal son, in his penury and misery, desired that he might be received but as a servant into his father's house, he was taken in and entertained as a son, and nothing of the costliest apparel and daintiest food was thought too good for him." [*Richard Rogers*, 1615.]

The Manifold Meaning of God's Answer to Israel's Prayer.

"It asserts the sovereignty of God in disposing and ordering the work which His servants have to perform.

"It reminds us that every one is not to attempt everything; for Judah is to fight the enemy, and the other tribes are to remain at home.

"It promises victory, not to every ardent soldier who might volunteer to take the field, but to the tribe

whom the Lord should order to the battle.

"It disturbs all rule-of-three calculations of success in proportion to the number of agents men may induce to go to work; success is for those whom the Lord shall send.

"It allows of no objection, no plea of incompetency, no deceitful humility, on the part of the called soldier; '*Judah shall go up:*' it is the word of a King.

"It hides pride from man, by declaring that although Judah would conquer, it would be only through Divine ordination and help." [*Luke H. Wiseman, M.A.*]

Beginning and Continuing.

"Israel is believing and obedient after the death of Joshua. Like a child after the death of its father, it has the best intentions. First love is full of flowing zeal. To begin well is never without a blessing. The best inheritance is to continue obedient towards God." [*Dr. Cassel.*]

"The words, 'I have delivered the land,' are meant prophetically; with God that which is certain in the future is as if it were present." [*Lisco.*]

"The death of Joshua is the date of degeneracy. So in spiritual respects: as long as the true Joshua lives in the soul, there is health. St. Paul says, 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'" [*Origen.*]

Prayer to God, and Co-operation with Men.—*Verses* 3, 4.

I. God's promises are not to provoke careless ease, but to stimulate us to holy caution and effort. Judah has received an unconditional and absolute promise, but seeks nevertheless the aid of Simeon. As Bachmann says, "It is not incompatible with the obedience of faith that Judah makes use of the helps placed by God at his disposal." It would be incompatible with true faith not to use such helps.

II. Those who are "workers together with God" must not despise the aid even of their weaker brethren. When men are working for the Lord and with the Lord (1) *They must not seek aid from the Lord's enemies;* (2) *They have a claim on all who are brethren;* (3) *The very weakest of their brethren may afford good help.*

III. Such as seek help from their brethren should be very willing to render help in return. "Come with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot." Trapp says, "The number *two* hath by the heathen been accounted accursed, because it was the first departure from unity." By the Christian, with a loftier outlook, that same number *two* might rather be blessed, because it is the first number at which true unity can begin. Real union is not in any one particle, or unit, but in the blending of many. The weakest may find some one he can help—may help even the strong.

"Let me not deem that I was made in vain,
Or that my being was an accident,
Which Fate, in working its sublime intent,
Not wished to be, to hinder would not deign.
Each drop uncounted in a storm of rain
Hath its own mission, and is duly sent
To its own leaf or blade, not idly spent
'Mid myriad dimples on the shipless main.
The very shadow of an insect's wing,
For which the violet cared not while it stayed,
Yet felt the lighter for its vanishing,
Proved that the sun was shining by its shade:
Then can a drop of the Eternal Spring,
Shadow of living light, in vain be made?"
—Hartley Coleridge.

Thus, the weakest worker has his mission: there is some one to whom he may be of service; but he who receives aid from the weak should not refuse to help the weak.

IV. "Those who help one another in love have reason to hope that God

will graciously help them both." God helps us more willingly when we are found in the union of brotherhood, than in the isolation of selfishness. Judah might have triumphed without Simeon; what we should rather remember is this—with Simeon, Judah did triumph." [*Partly from Matt. Henry.*]

Union in Works of Faith and Obedience.

"As by this specimen at the beginning of this book, showing what *two tribes* of Israel could do by faith and obedience against Adoni-bezek, who had subdued and enslaved *seventy kings*, God showed what the *twelve tribes* might have done, if they had believed and obeyed Him; and that all their subsequent miseries were due to defection from God. In like manner, also, the Christian Church, if men had followed the example of the Apostles—the Judahs and Simeons of the first ages—and gone forth in their spirit of faith and love against the powers of darkness, they might long since have evangelised the world. All the distresses of Christendom are ascribable to desertions from Christ, and not to any imperfection, as some have alleged, in Christianity." [*Dr. Wordsworth.*]

The Use of Means.

"All they are counted to tempt God, which trusting to God's promises do neglect human help. Christ hath no otherwise confuted the devil, which counselled Him to cast Himself down headlong, under the pretence of God's promise. David, in the latter book of Samuel, setteth himself forth unto us as an example, who being wonderfully adorned with the promises of God, used for all that in the insurrection of Absalom not only to flee away, but also the diligence of Hushai the Archite and of the priests. Yea, and Paul the Apostle, although his only confidence was in Christ, yet he appealed unto Cæsar, and made a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and testified that he was a citizen of Rome. It is evident, therefore, that we must use the help of nature and wisdom to obtain those things which God hath promised to give us. Wherefore the young men of our time are diligently to be admonished to attain unto languages, good arts and sciences, and that with great study; which they may, when opportunity serveth, use in preaching and defending the Gospel. For although God has promised that the preaching of His Word shall be fruitful through the benefit of His Spirit, yet must every man instruct himself in his vocation according to his ability." [*Peter Martyr*, 1560.]

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5–7.

The Recompence of Wickedness.

This lord of Bezek had grown into a very formidable tyrant. The seventy victims whom he had overcome and so cruelly mutilated were doubtless only petty princes, or chieftains, of small cities and their surrounding districts. The number seventy seems to make it certain that the depredations of this monster were committed in the surrounding neighbourhood, and among tribes of his own people, the Canaanites, as well as among more distant enemies. Adoni-bezek cut off the thumbs and toes of the kings he had vanquished. This was no doubt done to render them unfit for war, and thus in an age when men reigned by personal prowess, to prevent them from again coming to the power of government. The mutilation practised by this tyrant upon the captive kings, became afterwards very common in Roman history, when men cut off their own thumbs

to escape military service. On this Kitto remarks: "A trace of this practice exists in the word *poltron*, which we and the French have adopted from the Italian, which, while it immediately denotes a dastardly soldier who shrinks from his duty, etymologically signifies '*cut-thumb*,' being formed from *póllice* 'thumb,' and *trónco*, 'cut off, maimed.'"

I. The sin of Adoni-bezek. 1. *He was guilty of great cruelty.* No "custom of the times" could excuse this barbarity. The man himself felt that he had been remorselessly wicked, when a like judgment was inflicted on him by the men of Judah. By his own verdict he stands condemned. *Cruelty is one of the most heartless forms of wickedness.* It brings nothing to him who practises it. It is indulged in simply from brutal tastes, unless it be employed for purposes of extortion. It is a low delight in the sufferings of others. *Cruelty is one of the most degrading forms of wickedness.* Nothing so rapidly takes away a man's manhood. It is at the very antipodes of the cross. The Cross of Christ is an exhibition of voluntary suffering that others might be spared pain; cruelty is a selfish and coarse delight in others' pain. Nothing so enriches manhood as the spirit that sacrifices itself to save others; nothing so rapidly debases manhood as the spirit which delights in the pain of others. Reckless cruelty is the suicide of the moral nature. *Cruelty is perhaps the most rapidly increasing and incurable form of wickedness.* Some have given the palm to covetousness, but while covetousness seems ever fatal, the disease is of slower growth than cruelty. It takes but little time, after they have begun, beast-like, to taste blood, to make a Herod or a Nero; and from this vice, too, men never recover. Covetousness is a passion for self, heedless of others; cruelty is a passion against others, without even the motive of enriching self. There can be no place, even in hell, below where the cruel have their abode. This is the lowest discernible deep of the pit that is bottomless. 2. *Adoni-bezek was guilty of haughty pride.* It was not enough for him that the seventy kings should be mutilated; he made his poor maimed captives humble themselves daily in his presence, feeding them, like dogs, under his table upon the odds and ends which he chose to throw them. To the littleness of inflicting pain by a barbarous outrage, this tyrant added the further meanness of daily gloating over those whom he made to suffer. In this case it was true indeed, that "the haughty spirit goeth before a fall."

II. The punishment of this man's sin. The men of Judah "caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes." They used him as he had used others. They carried out the law of retaliation—"Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot," as they had been taught by Moses (Exod. xxi. 24; Lev. xxiv. 20, &c.). With a fine adaptation of the words of Isaiah touching the fallen king of Babylon, Kitto says concerning the mutilated Adoni-bezek, "Nor can there be any doubt that when the seventy discrowned princes beheld their old oppressor thus brought low, they rose from the dust to greet him, crying, Art thou also become like unto us, thou that didst weaken the nations, thou that madest the land to tremble?" We see in the judgment which overtook this man—1. *Sin punished during the sinner's lifetime.* 2. *Sin punished tardily, but no less certainly.* 3. *Sin so punished that the sinner is led to trace the connection between his own guilt and its consequences.* "As I have done, so God hath requited me." The punishment came in kind. The judgment was a mirror in which the criminal started as he beheld the features of his own manifold transgressions. God would not only have the guilty suffer; He would have them see clearly why they suffer.

III. The man's acknowledgment of God's justice. The narrative here throws into prominence the following points:—1. *An idolater's knowledge of the true God.* "*God* hath requited me." This man must have frequently heard of the God of the Israelites during the miracles of the wilderness and the triumphs

of Joshua. It was only in the hour of judgment that he acknowledged God. The most wicked will confess their faith in the Lord presently. In such faith we can trace no true repentance. It is the way of fallen spirits only to "believe" when they are made to "tremble." 2. *The activity of an idolater's conscience.* Adoni-bezek felt that this was a requital. Conscience may sleep long, but it wakes eventually in a power proportioned to the efforts which have been made to force it into quietude. 3. *An idolater acknowledging the justice of God's recompence of sin.* "*As* I have done, *so* hath God requited me." As the guilt, so was its reward. Long years of guilt, even in remorseless cruelty, cannot remove from the conscience its power of perceiving the justice of Divine punishment. It is only when men turn to speculating on the Bible theory of punishment that they get dissatisfied with what the Bible seems to reveal of the way of God in chastisement; those who suffer under God's hand are ever seen acquiescing in the fairness of sin's penalties. The penitent thief says, "The due reward of our deeds;" and the impenitent thief says not one word to suggest that he thinks contrariwise. Even Dives in torments does but speak of being tormented, and breathes no single word about injustice; nay, he even fears that his brothers must become as he is also. No sufferer under the hand of God, who speaks to us from the Bible, ever complains that the penalty is beyond the desert. Yet the Bible is very frank in its record of man's rebellious words. This silence from murmuring, and this acquiescence in the fairness of Divine chastisements, are also significant. The debates on God's justice in punishment will probably all be confined to time.

OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

God's Ministers of Judgment.—*Verses* 5, 6.

"And they found Adoni-bezek," &c. God has many ways of finding the transgressor. Sometimes He finds him with the messenger of disease; sometimes by losses or accidents; sometimes, as here, by the chastisements of avenging men; sometimes by the working of the sin itself. Thus Moses said to the tribes on the east of Jordan, "Be sure your sin will find you out." God, eventually, always finds the sinner out by some instrument or other. Thus Samuel finds Agag (1 Sam. xv. 33), and becomes the minister of Divine retribution; Saul finds and destroys the Amalekites four hundred years after they had fallen upon the Israelites (cf. 1 Sam. xv. 1–7); Mordecai and Esther find and expose Haman; Daniel's enemies are found by Darius and the lions. He who sins against his fellow-men should always be prepared to see his sin come back with a scourge in its hand. Jacob may deceive; he will presently be deceived. The Egyptians may murder the male children of Israel; the angel will avenge them in the death of the firstborn. David may sin against Bathsheba, and murder Uriah; his first sin shall be repaid to him in Absalom, and his second in Amnon. The retribution which overtakes Adoni-bezek is but a common issue of those transgressions in which one man does wilful harm to his fellows. It is noteworthy that all these prominent instances of retribution in the Scriptures are *not punishments of sin in general, but the punishment of sins against men.* It is as though God said, He who is guilty against men shall be requited during this life, even in the presence of men.

The Relation of God's Chastisements to Man's Offences.—*Verses* 6, 7.

"God has not relinquished the government of the earth: He orders and overrules everything now as much as ever; and in His former dispensations we behold a perfect exhibition of the government which He still admi-

nisters. Still, as formerly, does He requite the wickedness of men; sometimes *on the offenders themselves*, as when He smote Uzziah with leprosy; and sometimes *on others upon their account*, as when He slew seventy thousand of the people to punish the sin which David had committed in numbering his subjects. Sometimes He inflicts the judgment *immediately*, as on Herod, who was eaten up with worms; and sometimes *after a long season*, as on the sons of Saul for their father's cruelty to the Gibeonites many years before. Sometimes His judgments are sent *as preliminary to those heavier judgments that shall be inflicted in the eternal world*, . . and sometimes *after the offenders themselves have been forgiven*, as was experienced by David in his family (2 Sam. xii. 13, 14), and by Manasseh, whose iniquities were visited upon Israel after he himself had been received up to glory (2 Kings xxiv. 2–4). Sometimes His chastisements had *no particular affinity with the offence committed;* and sometimes the offence was *clearly marked in the punishment*, as in the case of Joram (2 Chron. xxi. 4–17), and as with David (2 Sam. xii. 10–12, and xvi. 21, 22). So minutely is this correspondence marked in the Scriptures, that even *the time and the place* are noticed as designed to manifest the very offence which God designed to punish; as Israel's wandering in the wilderness *forty years* on account of their murmuring at the reports which were brought them by the spies who had searched out the land *forty days* (Numb. xiv. 33, 34); and as Ahab's blood was licked up by dogs on the very spot where dogs had licked up the blood of Naboth, whom he had murdered.

"We might further notice the correspondence between the *spiritual* judgments which God sometimes inflicts for spiritual transgressions. Those who will not hearken to *His voice* He gives up to *their own counsels* (Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12); those who *abandon themselves to all manner of wickedness*, He gives up to *vile affections and a reprobate mind* (Rom. i. 26–28); and those who will *not receive His truth in order to salvation*, He gives up to their own delusions that they may be damned. . . .

"If any imagine that this conduct of God was confined to the nation whose temporal Governor He was, we must remind them that He dealt precisely in the same way with the heathen nations (Isa. xxxiii. 1), and has taught us to expect that He will do so to the end of time. . .

"From hence we may learn—

"I. To investigate the reasons of God's dealings with us. Every dispensation of Providence has a voice to which we should give diligent attention. I would say unto you therefore, 'Hear the rod and Him that hath appointed it.' If you see not the reason of it, go unto your God, and say, 'Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me;' and let no cross be suffered to escape from you, without having first paid to you that tribute of good which by the order of Providence you are entitled to exact.

"II. To repent of particular sins. . . . God has borne with us indeed; but we must not consider His longsuffering as any proof of His approbation: He is recording everything in the book of His remembrance, and will call us into judgment for it, whether it be good or evil. Let us then search and try our ways; let us pray that He will not 'remember against us the sins and transgressions of our youth.'

"III. To abound in every work of good. The godly, no less than the sinner, shall be recompensed in the earth' (Prov. xi. 31, xiii. 21). Visit and relieve your sick neighbour, and 'God will be with you in trouble, and make all your bed in sickness (Ps. xli. 1–3)." [*Charles Simeon, M.A.*]

THE ACCUSING CONSCIENCE QUICKENED BY DIVINE JUDGMENT.—*Verse* 7.

By the recent discovery and invention of Professor Hughes, sounds that have never before been audible to men may now be heard distinctly. Through the wonderful powers of the microphone, much in nature which once appeared silent is now vocal; and, as years go on, we may expect these still small voices not only to be heard but understood. Just as the microscope has revealed a new world to the eye, so will the microphone discover a new world to the ear. Similarly, God has a microphonic way in the moral world of making that audible which many have long since ceased to hear. Paul speaks of men "past feeling" whose consciences are "seared as with a hot iron." Such are not only past feeling the reproaches of conscience, but even past hearing them. Scripture history shows us very plainly, in not a few instances, that God has a method of making men hear again, who have long been deaf to the very feeble utterances of the conscience which they appear quite to have silenced. There are microphones in this moral world also, by which conscience not only becomes audible, but even overwhelming in the energy and terribleness of its tones. The following are a few of the forms in which the Bible shows us how the consciences of men may again speak so as to be heard in irresistible power:—

I. Conscience speaking through the pain of suffering in the present. Adoni-bezek can hear well enough through the pain of his own mutilation. "As I have done, so hath God requited me." In similar circumstances, Pharaoh heard the reproofs of his conscience through the medium of the ten plagues (cf. Exod. ix. 27, 28; x. 16, 17).

II. Conscience speaking through fear of suffering to come (1 Kings xxi. 20). The blood of Naboth cried out in the ears of Ahab at the very sight of Elijah. Hastening down to the vineyard, to take possession of the spoil of his murdered foe, he saw there, at the very gateway to the new estate, the terrible Elijah; and ere ever a word was said by the prophet, and in view of the judgment so surely casting its shadow before in the form of that stern Tishbite, conscience, silent in that dull bosom for many a year, made the poor guilty being cry in unmistakable alarm, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Men who are sinning in peace, should now and then listen for the sounds of conscience through the judgment to come. In view of this, men have sometimes found conscience overmastering creeds. Thus Herod, the Sadducee, who believed in no resurrection, said when he heard of Jesus, "It is John, whom I beheaded; *he is risen from the dead.*" Thus Volney prayed in the storm. Thus Byron struggled with himself to "be a man to the last."

III. Conscience speaking through the sufferings of the innocent. Judas sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver, but the thought of the guilt in which he had given Christ over to condemnation was too much to be endured. "When he saw that Jesus was condemned, he brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. . . . And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself." Conscience becomes audible also through the medium of the sufferings and blood of the innocent. What may not the Herods, and Nero, and Domitian, and Marius, and other tyrants, have heard of the thunders of conscience, when, in their more reflective moods, they found the moral atmosphere about them clarified and made resonant by thoughts of their innocent victims! While an oppressor is always a coward, there must come a time when he had need be among the bravest of the brave.

IV. Conscience speaking through severely chastened piety (cf. 2 Sam. xvi. 10.) In the punishment which waits on sin, not only the deliberately wicked, but the fallen righteous, hear the rebukes of conscience as they have seldom heard them before. Even the cursing tones of Shimei sound in the ears of transgressing David as the voice of a messenger of his God.

V. Conscience speaking unto salvation through gratitude for deliverance and mercy (Acts xvi. 24-30; Luke xv. 21). The jailor who had made the feet of Paul and Silas fast in the stocks, probably in antipathy towards them for the truth which they preached, heard conscience proclaiming his sin through the joy which he felt in the security of his prisoners and the consequent safety of his own life. He who in one moment "would have killed himself," is made to ask in the next, "What must I do to be saved?" It is in the hour of mercy that conscience forces the heart to such tears for sin as make sin seem most loathsome. As Whittier has truthfully written it—

> "Thy healing pains; a keen distress
> Thy tender light shines in;
> Thy sweetness is the bitterness,
> Thy grace the pang of sin."

Or, in the measure of an older and more familiar utterance, we have often expressed the feeling thus:—

> "When beneath the Cross adoring,
> Sin doth like itself appear."

The true microphone for making the voice of conscience at once audible and helpful is the Cross of Jesus Christ.

VI. Conscience heard speaking after a silence of many years (Gen. xlii. 21, 22). This was probably so in the case of Adoni-bezek; it was emphatically so with Joseph's brethren. More than twenty years after their inhuman guilt they are made to say, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother." That conscience has long been silent is no sign that it will not presently be heard in power. God knows how to awaken both what we call the sleeping and the dead.

VII. Conscience speaking in the presence of death (Josh. vii. 20). Achan, who was deaf to all self-rebuke during the despoiling of Jericho, heard conscience speaking with awful plainness when he knew that he must die. The death-sayings of the wicked have been showing, through many generations, that the vaulted cavern of a visibly open tomb has ever been a kind of intensified whispering-gallery, back from which the once unheard reproofs of conscience have rolled with a terrible energy through the departing soul. When conscience is silenced here, it seems to take on a distinct tongue for every forgotten sin, and to become a very Babel there. Happy is that man who learns to say, "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid."

"The Law of Requital."—*Verse 7.*

"This narrative is an illustration of a severe yet most holy law. 'The Lord of recompences shall surely requite.' 'With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' This is the law under which we are now living. Let us study some of its bearings, that we may live with religious wisdom.

"'As I have done, so God hath requited me.'"

I. "Then the life of man cannot escape the judgment of God. 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked;' man may *deny* it: may theoretically *disregard* it; but cannot *escape* it. At the heart of things is the spirit of judgment. Human life appears to be confused, but before the Almighty it has shape, and plan, and purpose.

II. "Then let no man take the law into his own hands. 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.' . . . *Why have we suffered loss in business?* May it not be that we have oppressed the poor and needy? *Why are our*

schemes delayed and thwarted? Probably because we have been obstinate and unfriendly towards the schemes of others. *Why are we held in disesteem or neglect?* Probably because of the contempt in which we have held our brethren. . . .

III. "Then every good deed will be honoured with appropriate reward. The law is equally effective on both sides 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love,' &c. 'Whosoever shall give a cup of cold water only,' &c. 'The liberal soul shall be made fat.' Remember: 1. *Good deeds are their own reward; 2. Deeds done merely for the sake of reward cannot be good.*

IV. "Then, though justice be long delayed, yet it will be vindicated eventually. Adoni-bezek had run a long course of wickedness. . . . Yet see him in the grip of the law, and learn that the time of punishment is with the Lord and not with man. Do you think that you have outwitted the law of retribution? God's hour is coming; a stormy and terrible hour. . . .

"But what of those who, having done evil, hate both themselves and their wickedness? There is a Gospel for such—'Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ,' will destroy the evil of the past, and satisfy the otherwise inexorable law of retribution." [*Dr. Parker.*]

NOTE.—For homiletic outlines and remarks on the paragraph that follows—vers. 8–16, see on the corresponding passages in the Book of Joshua, as treated in "The Preacher's Commentary."

OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17–36.

THE BATTLE THE LORD'S ONLY WHILE FOUGHT WITH THE LORD.—*Verses* 17–19.

I. Men working together with each other, and working in the fear of God. 1. *"Unity is strength" wherever unity is lawful.* Had Judah become confederate with idolaters, such an alliance would have wrought weakness. When Judah went with Simeon his brother, the Lord went with them both. 2. *To unite in God's work is of no avail unless we unite to serve in the fear of God.* That Judah and Simeon did this is evident. All Israel had inquired of the Lord, saying, "Who shall go up" (ver. 1)? In their victory over Zephath, they both devoted the city to the Lord, and re-named it Hormah, in token of having executed again upon it Jehovah's ban of judgment (see Critical Notes). Not only did they thus show that they were walking in the fear of God; they also "gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses had said," knowing that it was God who had spoken through Moses. Thus did Judah and Simeon start aright in this terrible work of war and judgment. God does not overlook even the faithful beginnings of those who depend upon His help and have respect unto His commandments.

II. Men working together with God, and thus working triumphantly. Zephath fell before them, and they took Gaza, and Askelon, and Ekron, with the territory bordering upon each. 1. *Success is not because of our co-operation with men, but because of our union with the Lord.* "The Lord was with Judah." The Lord was not kept from working with Judah by the fact that Judah had sought the help of Simeon. Had not Judah taken wise precautions, then the Lord might not have helped. God, also, helps them who wisely help themselves. Yet, though Simeon's aid was thus approved of, the battle was the Lord's. After we have done all that we can, He is our help and our shield. 2. *The Lord does not withhold His help because our union with Him may soon fail.* He who said to Peter, "Before the cock crow thou shalt deny Me thrice," saw well enough how soon Judah and Simeon would deny Him.

Yet God began with blessing the men who began by trusting. The crown of life is promised to those who are "faithful *unto death*;" but our Lord does not withhold all His mercies till we have proved our abiding fidelity. There are many victories given to us on this side of the crown. He who taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," gives that day's bread in answer to that day's believing prayer. 3. *The union with God that comes of even a small faith, may, nevertheless, lead to mighty victories.* The trust of Judah which utterly failed in sight of the iron chariots, could only have been feeble in these earlier conflicts. Had it been strong, the iron chariots could not so speedily have turned it into unbelief. Yet even with this feeble faith, Zephath, and Gaza, and Askelon, and Ekron were overcome. Union with God is everything. The faith that is just enough to lead men to union with God is as victorious as though it were perfect faith. It is not the amount of our faith that triumphs, but the fact that the Lord is on our side. Strong faith has most of rest and peace; strong faith gives most honour to God; but the faith that just suffices to do the Lord's bidding is also certain of victory. The trembling households of Israel, on the night of the slaying of the first-born, were just as safe as the confident households, if they had possessed faith enough to sprinkle the blood as they had been directed. The trembling gazer at the brazen serpent was healed as completely as the man who had no doubt of the result. She who did but find faith enough to secretly touch the hem of her Lord's garment found it better than twelve years' aid from the physicians. He who has faith enough to do his Lord's bidding, has also enough to command his Lord's help; and salvation is of the Lord's help, not of the measure of our trust.

III. Men working successfully with God, and yet coming to a point where God is no longer trusted. "And Jehovah was with Judah; and he took possession of the mountain, but the inhabitants of the valley were not to be expelled, because they had chariots of iron." Had Judah still trusted in the Lord, Judah had still been victorious. 1. *Where faith is severely tried, some promise may generally be found to sustain it.* It was so here. God had already said, through Moses (Deut. xx. 1), "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them; for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Similarly, some promise stands over against all our temptations to unbelief. 2. *The promises and our own personal experience always point in the direction of abiding trust.* As far as the men of Judah had trusted, they had not been confounded. They had conquered in every field where they had ventured to fight. Our past experience of God's help is never out of harmony with His written encouragements. 3. *In spite of both promises and experience, it is all too easy to give way to doubt.* God continually encourages men to go forward, and when, having known nothing of defeat, He sets before them an open door to some mercy in which all previous mercies might become crowned and complete, they shrink back in dismay, and thus risk the loss of everything. One may almost hear the Divine voice saying in this trial also, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" 4. *He who doubts God becomes subject to the repeated rebukes of history.* The people were rebuked by history which many of them might well remember. At the waters of Merom, under Joshua, they had defeated their enemies who were "as the sand upon the sea-shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many" (Josh. xi. 4). In the days yet to come multitudes of their grandchildren would see them reproved again. Bidden to the battle by a woman, Barak, a century later, led his little army against the multitudinous array of King Jabin, and Sisera, and his "nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people

that were with him," were discomfited, "and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword, and there was not a man left" (Judg. iv. 7, 13, 15, 16). Thus does God ever beset us behind and before with proofs of our folly in all our unbelief of His holy words.

MAKING SHIPWRECK OF FAITH AFTER A GOOD VOYAGE.—*Verse* 19.

I. Faith failing after much faith in the past. Judah had believed much, and therefore "the Lord was with Judah." Their previous faith is seen in three things. 1. *They had faith to offer acceptable prayer.* In common with all Israel they had asked of the Lord, "Who shall go up for us?" &c. That prayer was so offered that the Lord heard. 2. *They had faith to accept the issues of prayer.* He who really prays commits himself to great responsibilities. God may send him into the very forefront of the battle. Judah had so prayed. "And the Lord said, Judah shall go up." This post in the van of the Lord's war had been faithfully accepted. 3. *They had faith not only to go to battle, but to win victory after victory.* He that girds on the harness for God has faith, but he who continues his trust till the Lord makes him more than conqueror has yet a better faith. This also had Judah known. The Canaanites and the Perizzites, with Adoni-bezek, had been overcome. Zephath, Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron had also fallen. For all that, the faith of the men of Judah failed before the iron chariots. They were like those of whom Paul wrote: "Holding faith and a good conscience;" *that* in their earlier career: "which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck;" *that* in their later. To such, Paul said elsewhere: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" It is those that stand who have need to take heed lest they fall.

II. Faith failing by reason of looking on the things which are seen. The men of Judah looked on the iron chariots, and became disheartened and afraid; they should have looked on God's well-known love and oft-proved power to help them. 1. *No man can rightly understand the things of this life.* We judge of things in fragments and sections. Our view is too limited even for a bird's-eye view of what God sees as a whole. Even momentary defeat is often the way to victory. It was so at Ai. What if Joshua, instead of prostrating himself before the Lord in humble inquiry, had given up the war? Where, then, had been the inheritance? We are not told that Judah had been defeated even once by the iron chariots. But what if this were so? It might have been God's well-prepared way to more effectual victory. He who judges life and God by the few things which he can see, is in much the same position as a man who should attempt to decide on the merits of a painting by gazing at a square inch cut from the large picture on the canvas. 2. *That man is wisest who rests in the well-proved love and wisdom of God.* Philosophy has not ventured to raise any quarrel against the child who trusts in a wise and good father in preference to his own narrow judgment. It is only when our decisions have to do with the far more intricate perceptions of religious life that some would-be wise men tell us that it is not well to trust a Father in heaven whose love and mercy have been manifestly displayed for six thousand years. "We have no data," they tell us, "whereby to form any opinion of your religious matters; and we decline to accept your Christianity." As though any one of them would venture to commend the presumptuous boy who said to his father about some sphere unknown to his narrow wisdom: "I have no data; and I must decline to walk when I cannot see clearly for myself." A great deal of our walking, even in temporal things, has to be done by faith in some one else. Must it not be so, much more, when the path we travel leads

to a life and a world that no living man has seen? 3. *Thus, he best hears, and best fights, who endures "as seeing Him who is invisible."* "No man hath seen God at any time," as he has seen an earthly parent; yet he who walks the path of the Divine testimonies humbly will say, with no lack of confidence, "The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." The whole question of modern faith rests here: Is Jesus Christ to be believed? was He false? or was He mistaken? Till that is settled by all who doubt it, nothing else is worth arguing.

III. Failing faith declining the conflict, and thus getting nothing more of victory. Judah rested, and forthwith God rested. In that case there was nothing for it but that conquest should cease also. In this mood, not an acre more could be added to the inheritance. How silently God seems to have rested! For some time we hear of no single word of reproof or exhortation when He had been thus dishonoured. God left His people to find out by bitter experience their sin against Him, and their folly as it concerned themselves. It is not seldom thus. God sits in silence which we might well feel to be appalling, and leaves unbelief to work out its own shame and pain. Meanwhile, the enemies of faith find power enough to become "as thorns in the sides" of those who have forgotten their God.

IV. The failing faith of leading men becoming utterly ruinous to the faith of others. Judah had been chosen to take the lead in the war which followed the death of Joshua. While Judah was strong in faith, Simeon was strong also. Perhaps it was under the influence of their joint victories that Joseph was stirred up to the conflict in which Bethel was taken. When Judah fell, defection forthwith spread itself throughout all Israel. Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulon, Asher, and Naphtali all failed in the failure of Judah. And not long after it remained to be written: "And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites. . . . And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgat the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves." "No man liveth to himself." He who fails in faith, destroys the faith of others. Ruinous, indeed, are the results when they fail whom God has called and qualified to lead.

God Leaving His People Helpless.—*Verse* 19.

"The Lord was with Judah" only so long as Judah believed. God declines to help those who decline to trust in Him. It would do His people harm. It would put a premium on doubt, and timidity, and idleness, were the Lord to present His soldiers with victory while they refused the conflict. Dr. Thomas remarks on this verse: "It is said that *God could not* drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they —the inhabitants of the mountain— had chariots of iron." But it is not said that *God* could not drive them out. Even in the English text the sense is clearly intimated as being—Judah could not drive them out, the nearest antecedent being "Judah," and not "the Lord." But the Hebrew certainly does not say that "*God could not*" drive them out. The literal rendering of the verse stands thus: "And was Jehovah with Judah, and he took possession of the mountain; but not to be expelled (were) the inhabitants of the valley, for chariots of iron (were) to them." This is very different from "God could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley." It is undoubtedly true, as a point of doctrine, that God *cannot* do that which is wrong, and which would work evil. It is thus similarly said of Christ in His own country, "He could there do no mighty

work," the reason assigned, elsewhere, being that this was "because of their unbelief." God could not help the unbelieving men of Judah with mighty works: still, that is not how "it is said" in this verse.

No Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked.

"As Augustine has said, 'God is not a cruel tormentor, but a just corrector.' Moreover, because holy men are very familiar with God, and therefore when by some heavenly revelation they are ascertained of His will, because they exceedingly love Him they cannot but allow His sentence; yea, they faithfully pray that the same may be accomplished; although, in that they be men, they be both sorry and also take it grievously to have their neighbours so vexed. After which sort Samuel mourned for Saul the king, whom he knew nevertheless to be rejected of God. Jeremiah also wept for the captivity which was at hand; and Christ wept for the city of Jerusalem which should be destroyed. They which be men indeed, cannot but be sorry for their neighbours and their own flesh when it is afflicted. Neither doth God require of us that we be stoical and lacking in compassion." [*Peter Martyr.*]

The Gift of Hebron to Caleb.—*Verse* 20.

This verse is certainly not "a conclusive proof that this campaign (of Judah and Simeon) took place in Joshua's lifetime," as stated by the Speaker's Commentary. All the time the Canaanites were in such force in the lot of Judah as is represented in vers. 3–6, Caleb could not have held Hebron in peaceable security. He might have continued to hold the city from the time of his victory (which is recorded both in Josh. xv. 13, 14, and in the retrospective parenthesis of this chapter) to the time of the campaign of Judah and Simeon; but the city was, probably, more or less threatened by the growing power of the Canaanites. After the victories of the two tribes, Caleb's possession of Hebron would have been comparatively undisturbed. But the men of Judah, so far from taking any advantage over Caleb, gave him Hebron, as Moses had said. They did not give him the city *for the first time;* Joshua had given it before the men of Judah gave it, and Moses before Joshua. To say that the gift as stated here is "a conclusive proof that the campaign took place in Joshua's lifetime" has no more force than to say that Josh. xiv. 13 is a conclusive proof that Joshua's gift of Hebron took place in the lifetime of Moses. Hebron was given to Caleb, in promise, by Moses; it was re-given by Joshua, when the adjacent country had been partly subdued. With this title to the city, Caleb wrested it from the Canaanites, and apparently held it amid increasing dangers till the overthrow of Adoni-bezek and the conquest of Zephath and the western strongholds, at which time its security was threatened. From this danger the two tribes delivered Hebron; and as situated in their own territory, and liberated by their efforts, the men of Judah still gave the city to Caleb They thus confirmed the previous gift of both Moses and Joshua. The verse is really needed here as an assurance that Caleb was suffered to retain his heritage. The retrospective clause with which the verse closes, is simply a repetition, quite in keeping with the author's manner throughout the chapter.

The Inactivity of Benjamin.—*Verse* 21.

The boundary of Judah and Benjamin divided the city of Jerusalem, the lower city belonging to the former tribe, and the upper city with its stronghold, so long retained by the Jebusites, to the latter. The eighth verse tells us that the men of Judah had taken that part of the city which lay in their territory, while this verse records the slothfulness of the men of Benjamin in suffering their part of Jerusalem to remain in the hands of their enemies.

I. **Benjamin's want of faith.** There was want of faith (1) in God's warnings (Numb. xxxiii. 55); (2) in God's willingness or power to help; (3) in the blessings which ever follow obedience

II. **Benjamin's want of love.** Love to God should have prompted the people at least to make an effort to do as God had commanded them. They seem, however, to have made no attempt to take the city. The Lord had done great things for them, but they were not glad enough in Him even to strive to obey. Love to their brethren should have stimulated them to the attack. This motive failed also.

III. **Benjamin's want of zeal.** The people of the tribe seem to have quietly settled down to make the best of things as they were. He who lacks faith and love now will be no less wanting in zeal for the Lord of Hosts. The issues of life as to life's conflicts are also out of the heart, and he who would win many victories must keep his heart with all diligence.

IV. **Benjamin's readiness to copy a bad example.** Judah was the first to go up against the Canaanites. For a time the men of Judah walked by faith, and conquered; then they walked by sight, and the iron chariots were too much for the courage which depended on what could be seen. The Benjaminites were far more ready to copy the bad example than the good. Evil is ever more contagious than virtue. The pre-disposition of the heart is ever toward sin. He who walks much with evil-doers has need of great grace to keep him from following evil.

V. **Benjamin's lost opportunity.** The city which the people feared to attack now was not taken till four hundred years afterwards (2 Sam. v. 6–10). The Lord was waiting to be with Benjamin, just as much as He was "with Judah" and "with Joseph." But Benjamin let the day for conflict go by, and for four centuries no occasion of sufficient promise to stimulate them to victory ever returned. Even when the city was taken, Saul the Benjaminite king was passed over, and David who was of, in this matter, the more faithful tribe of Judah, was chosen as the instrument for adding the stronghold of Zion to the territory of Israel. Henceforth, this part of Jerusalem became at once "the City of David," "the City of the Great King," and the site of the temple of Jehovah. Opportunity once forfeited by sinful unbelief and sloth is often slow to return. "To-day is the accepted time" for a good many mercies that may have fled for ever to-morrow.

Chronological Note.—"We have a firm *datum* for determining more minutely the time when the book of Judges was written, in this statement that the Jebusites in Jerusalem had not been rooted out by the Israelites, but dwelt there with the children of Benjamin '*unto this day.*' The Jebusites remained in possession of Jerusalem, or of the citadel Zion, or the upper town of Jerusalem, until the time when David went against Jerusalem after the twelve tribes had acknowledged him as king, took the fortress of Zion, and made it the capital of his kingdom under the name of the City of David (2 Sam. v. 6–9; 1 Chron. xi. 4–9). Consequently the book was written before this event, either during the first seven years of the reign of David at Hebron, or during the reign of Saul, under whom the Israelites already enjoyed the benefits of a monarchical government, since Saul not only fought with bravery against all

the enemies of Israel, and 'delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them' (1 Sam. xiv. 47, 48), but exerted himself to restore the authority of the laws of God in his kingdom, as is evident from the fact that he banished the wizards and necromancers out of the land (1 Sam. xxviii. 9). The Talmudical statement therefore in *Bava-bathra*, to the effect that Samuel was the author of the book, may be so far correct, that if it was not written by Samuel himself towards the close of his life, it was written at his instigation by a younger prophet of his school. More than this it is impossible to decide. So much, however, is at all events certain, that the book does not contain traces of a later age either in its contents or in its language, and that chap. xviii. 30 does not refer to the time of the captivity." [*Keil.*]

Dr. Cassel further remarks on this point, "If our book had not been written before the time of David, references to his reign could not be wanting. From Othniel's time, the tribe of Judah, David's tribe, falls into the background. The mention of it in the history of Samson is far from honourable. The relatively copious treatment of affairs in which *Benjamin* figures, points to the time of King Saul. While the history of Othniel is quite summarily related, that of Ehud is drawn out to the minutest detail. Similarly rich is the flow of tradition in the narrative concerning Gibeah (chap. xix. *seq.*). Saul says of himself that he is 'of the smallest of the tribes' (1 Sam. ix. 21). This history of Gibeah explains the cause of Benjamin's smallness, and traces it to the savage war made on him by Israel."

Faith, Obedience, and Victory.—*Verse* 22.

I. Faith and obedience helped by brotherly union. The house of Joseph consisted of both Manasseh and Ephraim. So long as they worked together, these brother-tribes seem to have gathered encouragement from each other. When they were united, Bethel was fearlessly, diligently, and successfully attacked. Separating from each other, both Manasseh and Ephraim are found slothful, weak, and disobedient (vers. 27–29). Says a Spanish proverb: "Three, helping each other, are as good as six." Similarly an Italian proverb tells us that, "Three brothers are three castles." In the Lord's work we all need each other.

II. Faith and obedience stimulated on the ground of former mercies. It was against Bethel that the children of Joseph went up. The very name was an inspiration: fighting for the "house of God," would not God certainly be with them! But the name had, no less, an inspiring history. Here good old Jacob, their common father, had seen his vision of the angel-trodden ladder, set up between earth and heaven, and "he called the name of that place Bethel" (Gen. xxviii. 19). William Hazlitt remarks in his opening lecture on the English Poets: "There can never be another Jacob's dream. Since that time, the heavens have gone further off, and grown astronomical." Doubtless; there cannot be any dreaming of the ancient vision over again, yet who does not feel that the original dream has lost nothing of its power even to us, the astronomical vastness of our unladdered heavens notwithstanding. What an inspiration it must have been to the sons of Joseph as they went to battle on this scene, made so bright to Jacob with the vision of ascending and descending angels of his God! Again, God had sent Jacob to Bethel after his return from Laban. Here, at the Divine command, he had built an altar; at this very spot the nurse of Jacob's mother lay interred; here the new name "Israel" had been confirmed; on this very ground the promise had been given that "a nation and a company of nations" should be of Jacob their father; here the covenant to Abraham and Isaac had been renewed, "And the land, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land;" and here, for the second time, had Jacob set up a pillar of stone, and poured oil upon the top of it, and called the name of the place the "house of God." That this history was carefully remembered is clear from the fact that the name Bethel was again substituted for Luz; and that the history was reverently cherished is no less clear from the way in which for a long time after, Bethel was made a place for enquiring of the Lord (cf. chap. xx. 18, 26, 27; xxi. 2). These memories

of God's mercies to Jacob, and of the absolute promise on that very spot to give the land to his seed, could not have done other than make the house of Joseph strong for this conflict. The very stones could hardly "hold their peace" if faith and zeal should falter here. On not a few of the fields where God calls us to conflict, similar encouragements wait to strengthen all who will reverently search them out.

III. Faith and obedience helped by the Lord at the very outset. "And the Lord was with them." No sooner does Joseph go up to the Lord's war, than the Lord goes with him. He who sets out for God, and in obedience to God, has God with him even at setting out. On the contrary, he who declines to begin to walk in the way of the Divine commandments, can never have it truly written that "the Lord was with him." This word occurs no more in this chapter. It was not spoken of any of the tribes who did not attempt to drive out the inhabitants; equally, when Manasseh and Ephraim failed in faith and obedience, nothing more is said of the Lord's presence. He who never begins to serve God never feels able to serve; he who sincerely attempts to fight against sin in himself or in others, only finds that he is helpless when he ceases to be sincere. Even the withered hand can begin to move when it tries to lift itself at the bidding of Christ.

IV. Faith and obedience crowned with victory. Bethel fell, and its inhabitants were slain, according to the Divine commandment. There can be no question of victory when we begin and continue and end our warfare with the Lord of Hosts for our helper. If the Lord be on our side, greater is He that is for us than all they which be against us (cf. 2 Kings vi. 16; 2 Chron. xxxii. 7; Ps. lv. 18). To all who faithfully contend, seeking His help, Christ has certainly promised the crown of life.

Luz and Bethel.—*Verse* 23.

The word Bethel occurs before, Gen. xxviii. 19, in which place this name is said to have been given to Luz by Jacob. In Gen. xii. 8, we are told that Abram removed from the plain of Moreh "unto a mountain on the east of Bethel." This is only an evidence that the book of Genesis was written after Jacob's vision, and that the new name which Jacob had given to Luz is carried back by the author, with an anachronism, to the time of Abram. As to the slightly different sites of Luz and Bethel, see Preacher's Commentary on Joshua, p. 270.

The Traitorous Bethelite.—*Verses* 24, 25.

There is no reason for thinking that this man believed in God, and that from motives of religious faith he betrayed his city to the Israelites. Some of the older authors have compared his case to that of Rahab. It need hardly be said that, in motive, they are evidently and utterly unlike. Rahab was manifestly overwhelmed with the conviction that the God of the Israelites was the true God, that the end of her people was at hand; and in that belief she sought a refuge for herself and her household under the mighty God of Jacob, through the medium of His people. This Bethelite probably believed nothing of the kind. He expressed no faith in God; not casting in his lot with God's people, he evidently got away from them, with his family, as soon as he could make his escape; and, so far from being oppressed by the sense of his traitorous conduct, he called his new city by the name of the city he had helped to deliver up to the Israelites. On the other hand, Dr. Adam Clarke's abuse of the poor creature is needlessly extravagant. He was probably no willing traitor. He did not betray his

city for gain. The man had not had the advantage of Dr. Clarke's training, nor had he breathed the healthy atmosphere of a land which had long been blessed with great civil and religious liberty and knowledge. He was merely a weak man, trembling for his personal safety, and having perhaps no small fear for his family. His act was not an exalted one, but the ordeal which he had to undergo might have sorely tried even a better man.

THE BETHELITE IN "THE LAND OF THE HITTITES."—*Verse* 26.

The land of the Hittites must not be confused with the land of the Chittim, which probably had its original centre on the sea-coast north of Sidon, and subsequently extended to Cyprus and to some of the adjacent islands and coasts of the Mediterranean. Dr. Cassel is of opinion that "Movers has successfully maintained that חִתִּים and כִּתִּים refer to the same race of people." This, however, cannot be, unless we are prepared to ignore the Biblical account of their entirely distinct origin. The Chittim, or more correctly the Kittim, were descended from Japheth; while the Hittites were the sons of Heth, or Cheth, and thus belonged to the family of Ham. The Scripture account of the two races is, from the first, so distinctly and consistently maintained, both as to the territory occupied and the Hebrew spelling of the two names, that no considerable intermixture of the two families is at all probable. In Gen. x. 4 and 1 Chron. i. 7, Kittim, the son of Javan, the son of Japheth, is named as the father of the people dwelling in what the E.V. invariably calls Chittim. From the first to the last of Old Testament notices, these Kittim are mentioned as a maritime people, dwelling to the north of Canaan, and they are, moreover, repeatedly associated with the great Tyrian and Sidonian commerce (cf. Numb. xxiv. 24; Isa. xxiii. 1, 12; Jer. ii. 10; Ezek. xxvii. 6; Dan. xi. 30). On the other hand, the Hittites are kept equally distinct both orthographically and geographically. Though a numerous people, they were manifestly of feebler character and of more uncertain locality than the hardy commercial Kittim of the north. Tribally, their dwelling-place twice appears as being in the neighbourhood of Hebron (Gen. xxiii. 17–20; xlix. 30), and twice as "in the mountains" (Numb. xiii. 29: Josh. xi. 3). Generically, the words חִתִּים (Hittites), and מַלְכֵי הַחִתִּים (Kings of the Hittites), are occasionally used to describe the Canaanites under a common appellation (Josh. i. 4; 1 Kings x. 29; 2 Kings vii. 6). With these facts in view, it obviously cannot be correct to treat the Hittites and the inhabitants of Kittim as "the same race of people," notwithstanding that subsequent Phœnician coins may be "designated by the terms חת and כת."

As to the town built by this Hittite from Bethel, the site of it is unknown. Speaking of the ruin of the older Shechem, Dean Stanley remarks: "The very graphic description of Shechem in Theodotus as 'under the roots of the mountain' is decisive against placing it on the summit of Gerizim. He speaks of the name 'Louzah,' as given to the ruins of Gerizim by the Samaritan high-priest at Nâblus, which certainly agrees with the position of Luza noticed by Jerome (Onomast., *Luza*). Can this be the second Luz, founded by the inhabitants of Luz when expelled by the Ephraimites from Bethel?" This may be, but it scarcely seems probable when we are told that the man went "into the land of the Hittites" to build his city, and when we bear in mind that Ebal and Gerizim were held at this time by the powerful tribe of Ephraim, and that only Gezer is named, in ver. 29, as a place from which the Ephraimites had failed to expel the Canaanites,— Gezer being near to Beth-horon, and standing on the southern boundary-line of the tribe (Josh. xvi. 3,

Helpers of the Lord's People.

"There are four classes of persons whose various conduct towards the Church of God, and to the Gospel preached by her, is represented by four cases in the books of Joshua and Judges.

"1. There is the case of the man of Bethel. He might have dwelt with the men of Joseph at Bethel, and have become a worshipper of the true God, and have thus become a citizen for ever of the true Bethel, the house of God, which will stand for ever. But he quits the house of God to propagate heathenism and idolatry. The man of Bethel, therefore, is presented to us in this Scripture as a specimen of that class of persons who help the Church of God in her work from motives of fear, or of worldly benefit, and not from love of God; and who, when they have opportunities of spiritual benefit, slight those opportunities, and even shun the light, and go away from Bethel, the house of God, as it were, unto some far-off land of the Hittites, and build there a heathen Luz of their own.

"2. There is the case of the Kenites (ver. 16), who helped Judah after their victories in Canaan, and were received into fellowship with them.

"3. There is the case of the Gibeonites, who came to Joshua from motives of fear, and were admitted to dwell with Israel as hewers of wood and drawers of water.

"4. There is the case of Rahab. She stands out in beautiful contrast to the man of Bethel. He helped the spies of Joseph, and was spared, with his household, but did not choose to live in their Bethel. But Rahab received the spies of Joshua, even before he had gained a single victory, and she professed her faith in their God; and she was spared, she and her household, and she became a mother in Israel, and an ancestress of Christ." [*Wordsworth.*]

"It is of no avail to conquer by faith, unless it be also maintained in faith; for Bethel became afterwards a Beth-aven, a House of Sin." [*Dr. Cassel.*] Cf. 1 Kings xii. 29; Hosea iv. 15, v. 8, x. 5. The remark, however, of Gesenius should here be borne in mind: "The Talmudists have confounded this town with the neighbouring city of Beth-El, from the latter having been sometimes called by the prophets, in contempt, Beth-Aven." Beth-Aven, as is seen by Josh. vii. 2, was near to Ai on the east side of Bethel.

Manasseh and Ephraim.—*Verses* 27–29.

These verses are, in substance, a recapitulation of the previous statements in Josh. xvi. 10; xvii. 11–13. But the repetition, so far from being needless, is necessary on two grounds; it shows that since the negligent beginning recorded in the book of Joshua there had been no improvement, saving in the capture of Bethel. This continued disobedience is also set forth as an introduction to, and a reason for, the calamities recorded throughout this book of Judges.

For additional homiletic remarks on the subject of these verses, see the Preacher's Commentary on Joshua, pp. 266, 272–274, 280.

Forsaking the Lord's Work.—*Verses* 27, 28.

These records which follow to the end of the chapter, remind us of the unfinished towers which were spoken of by our Lord, and of the war undertaken with too little thought (Luke xiv. 28–32). There are a great many unfinished towers in the world which ought never to have been begun; there

are a great many more which, having been begun, ought certainly to have been completed. Just the same may be said of life's conflicts. Manasseh, and Ephraim, and the rest of these tribes, did not fail in completing their warfare because they had begun imprudently, but because they did not continue believingly. The tower of conquest was unfinished, not because they had not counted the cost at the beginning, but because they forgot their infinite resources in the help of Jehovah. We see in these verses—

1. Men forsaking a work which had been begun after long preparation. The plagues of Egypt, the miracles of the wilderness, the gifts of the manna and other supplies, and the long period of discipline in the desert, were all designed to lead up to the full inheritance of the land.

II. Men forsaking a work which had already been prosecuted with great energy and at great cost. How strikingly does the indifference here contrast with the passage of the Jordan, with the rapid movements at Beth-horon and the Waters of Merom, and, indeed, with the vigour displayed in all the earlier part of the campaign! What vast efforts and unflinching zeal had been previously expended on this great work of conquest! Now, with the inheritance almost in hand, the strife is abandoned. The Church has thrown away not a little energy for want of just a little more. When the seed of past efforts is not cultivated right up to the point where harvest is sure, it may, after all our labour, only result in a harvest of thorns which vex us (cf. Numb. xxxiii. 55; Josh. xxiii. 13; Judg. ii. 3).

III. Men forsaking a work about which they had cherished ardent hopes. The whole way up from Egypt had been a long path of expectation. Enthusiasm had often been high, as in the song at the Red Sea, and in the service at Ebal. We see here brilliant hopes blasted for ever for want of a little more faith and a little more service. How many of our once cherished visions have fled for the same reason!

IV. Men forsaking a work in which they had already won splendid triumphs. The path of their past prowess was almost vocal against this sinful inaction and unbelief. The ruins of Jericho were a protest that must have seemed almost audible to the few more godly of the host. The great days of Beth-horon and of Merom might well have waked every sleeper with loud-echoing rebukes.

V. Men forsaking a work to which God had commanded them, in which God had marvellously helped them, and in which He no less waited to help them still. They did not "remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." "They forgat His works." No less did they forget His absolute commands, and His unbroken promises. Herein they grievously sinned, and in this sin lies the terribly appropriate introduction which this chapter makes to the great sorrows and humiliations and further transgressions recorded throughout this entire book.

Unconquered Parts of our Inheritance.—*Verse* 29.

The fruits of the most brilliant victories blighted for want of grace to follow them up.

The inheritance which has been won by much faith becoming a ground of temptation and trouble for want of a little more faith.

The unconquered parts of our estate in God bringing a curse on us in those we have conquered (cf. 1 Chron. xx. 4; 2 Sam. xxi. 18).

The possessions which the Lord's people fail to win, given to them presently under circumstances of much humiliation (cf. 1 Kings ix. 15–17).

The Lord's help failing when men fail to diligently use it. The Lord who had been "with Judah" and

"with Joseph," was no less ready to be with Ephraim.

The ground for prayer becoming untenable to those who fail to take encouragement from the Lord's goodness. David prayed (Ps. cxxxviii. 8) "Forsake not the works of Thine own hands." When the Israelites themselves forsook this work, they could hardly pray that the Lord would not forsake it.

The sinful disobedience of men carrying its own acknowledgment that it is without excuse. Manasseh and Ephraim, who thought they could not conquer, both put their enemies under tribute (ver. 28; 1 Kings v. 13, ix. 15).

The Position and Neighbourhood of Gezer.

"The situation of Gezer may be exactly determined from Josh. xvi. 3. The border of Ephraim proceeds from Lower Beth-horon, by way of Gezer, to the sea. Now, since the position of Beth-horon is well ascertained (*Beit 'Ur et-Tatha*), the border, running northwest past Ludd, which belonged to Benjamin, must have touched the sea to the north of Japho, which likewise lay within the territory of Benjamin. On this line, four or five miles east of Joppa, there still exists a place called *Jesûr* (*Jazour, Yazûr*), which can be nothing else than Gezer. It is not improbable that it is the Gazara of Jerome (p. 137, ed. Parthy), *in quarto milliario Nicopoleos contra septentrionem*, although the distance does not appear to be accurately given. The *Ganzur* of Esthor ha-Parchi (ii. 434), on the contrary, is entirely incorrect.

"The position of Gezer enables us also to see why Ephraim did not drive out the inhabitants. The place was situated in a fine fertile region. It is still surrounded by noble corn-fields and rich orchards. The agricultural population of such fruitful regions were readily permitted to remain for the sake of profit, especially by warlike tribes who had less love and skill for such peaceful labours than was possessed by Issachar." [*Dr. Cassel.*]

The District of Kitron and Nahalol.—*Verse* 30.

Kitron is taken by Gesenius to be the Kattath of Josh. xix. 15, which is there mentioned with Nahallal, or Nahalol. The name of this latter place is from *nahal*, "*to lead*," specially to *lead to water*, or *with protecting care*. Hence Gesenius supposes Nahalol to mean "*pasture* to which cattle are *led out* (cf. *Heb.*, Isa. vii. 19)." Dr. Cassel thinks that Kitron and Nahalol were put to tribute for exactly the same reason as was Gezer—because they were both surrounded by rich pasture-lands. He further says of Nahalol: "It answers perhaps to *Abilîn*, a place from which a wady somewhat to the northwest of *Seffûrieh* has its name. For this name comes from *Abel*, which also means pasture. This moreover suggests the explanation why from just these two places the Canaanites were not expelled. They both became tributary, and remained the occupants and bailiffs of their pastures and meadows." As similar features of profitable tribute are equally suggested by several of the names in the following verses, there seems some ground for the suspicion that greed and idleness, in some cases, had even more to do than fear with the disobedience of the various tribes.

The Power of Evil Examples.—*Verses* 30–33.

A bad example is full of evil issues; what one tribe does another does also. All the western tribes, saving Issachar, seem to have followed the dereliction of Judah. Judah did run well, but the iron chariots, and a love of ease, became hindrances to a continued obedience to the truth.

The evil example of the great and powerful is specially harmful; Judah and Joseph draw all the rest in the train of their disobedience.

These evil examples and their evil results are all well remembered by God. Richard Rogers quaintly observes: "Let not men be deceived; God hath all these things and such like registered and written, not with ink and paper (for then there were hope that in time they might be worn out), but in His remembrance, which never faileth. If Paul, who is so rare a pattern of piety, desires that men follow not his example further than he follows Christ, what shall they have to answer who look no further than to this, that, however odious their doings are, they see others do the same? They that lead and entice us on by their example, cannot help us to bear our punishment when their own shall become intolerable to them."

"Example is like the press: a thing done is the thought printed; it may be repeated, but it cannot be recalled; it has gone forth with a self-propagating power, and may run to the ends of the earth, and descend from generation to generation." [*Melville.*]

"There is at the top of the Queen's staircase in Windsor Castle, a statue, from the studio of Baron Triqueti, of Edward VI. marking with his sceptre a passage in the Bible which he holds in his left hand, and upon which he earnestly looks. The passage is that concerning Josiah: 'Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.' The statue was erected by the will of the late Prince, who intended it to convey to his son the divine principles by which the future governor of England should mould his life, and reign on the throne of Great Britain." [*T. Hughes.*]

"I am not the rose, but I have been with the rose, and therefore am I sweet." [*Eastern Proverb.*]

"Take away yourselves from among the evil ones; for if ye, being weak and unskilful, shall company with them, ye must needs both see and hear very many things against godliness and the religion which you profess. And because you are able neither to confute nor to reprove them, you shall seem to be as witnesses of blasphemies and a reproach of the truth. And, peradventure, there will remain a sting in your minds, wherewith your conscience will be vexed longer than you think for." [*Peter Martyr.*]

UNDESTROYED MONUMENTS OF IDOLATRY.—*Verses* 33–36.

The names of several of these places were notoriously derived from the idolatrous worship of which they were so many centres and strongholds. Beth-shemesh was "the house of the sun," and *Har-cheres*, or Mount Heres, "the mountain of the sun." These pointed to the worship of the sun. Of Beth anath, "the house of response" (perhaps "of echo," *Gesen.*), Cassel says: "The name indicates that its situation was that of the present Bâniâs, the ancient Paneas. The inscriptions on the grotto called Panium, still point to the echo. One of them is dedicated the 'echo-loving' Pan. The love of Pan for the nymph Echo was a widely-spread myth. Another inscription tells of a man who dedicated a niche to the Echo." While the identification of Bâniâs with Beth-anath rather than with Baal-gad may be questioned, it is quite possible that the worship of the "echo-loving" Pan was carried on at Beth-anath also. In any case this town could not have been far from Bâniâs, or Cæsarea-Philippi. Eusebius and Jerome speak of it as Batanæa, fifteen miles east of Bâniâs, which is not a great distance for the spread of a prominent feature of idolatry.

These monuments of idolatry the

men of Naphtali and Dan suffered to remain in their midst. They spared the inhabitants, and the towns, and the ancient idolatrous names, and thus helped to perpetuate in their very midst the pernicious idolatrous influence. Dan, in the south-western possession of this tribe, seems to have been overpowered for a time; but yet the "heavy hand" of the house of Joseph was stretched out only to make tributaries, and not to overthrow idolatry. To this arrangement Dan also probably consented.

"Our corrupt nature will show mercy only where severity should be used, and is altogether rough and hard where gentleness might be practised.

"Self-conceit, avarice, and self-interest can bring it about that men will unhesitatingly despise the command of God.

"When human counsels are preferred to the express word and command of God, the result is that matters grow worse and worse." [*Starke.*]

"Obedience and love toward God are wrecked on greediness and love of ease.

"Perfect obedience is the only safe way. Every departure from it leads downhill into danger.

"The fear of God is still ever the beginning of wisdom; but it must not be mixed with the fear of men.

"Preaching is still ever effective; but respect to tribute and profitable returns must not weaken it.

"The Word of God has not lost its power; but the people who have it on their tongues do not thoroughly enter into its life.

"When confession and life do not agree, the life must bear the consequences." [*Dr. Cassel.*]

"The sin prepared its own punishment, and the love of present ease became the cause of their perpetual disquiet." [*Scott.*]

CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNING OF THE LORD'S REBUKE.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. An angel of the Lord.**] Not merely "*a messenger*," but the "*angel of Jehovah.*" "The phrase is used nearly sixty times to designate the angel of God's presence." [*Speaker's Commentary.*] "Not a prophet, or some other earthly messenger of Jehovah, either Phinehas or Joshua, as the Targums, the Rabbins, Bertheau, and others assume, but the angel of the Lord, who is of one essence with God. In the simple historical narrative a prophet is never called *Malach Jehovah*. The prophets are always called either נָבִיא or אִישׁ נָבִיא, as in chap. vi. 8, or else 'man of God,' as in 1 Kings xii. 22, xiii. 1, &c.; and Hag. i. 13, and Mal. iii. 1, cannot be adduced as proofs to the contrary, because in both these passages the purely appellative meaning of the word *Malach* is established beyond all question by the context itself. Moreover, no prophet ever identifies himself so entirely with God as the angel of Jehovah does here. The prophets always distinguish between themselves and Jehovah by introducing their words with the declaration 'Thus saith Jehovah,' as the prophet mentioned in chap. vi. 8 is said to have done." [*Keil.*] The language itself proclaims the presence of the Angel of the Covenant; it cannot be thought of as the utterance of a merely human messenger. **Came up from Gilgal.**] The situation of Bochim is unknown. As the people were assembled in congregation (ver. 4), probably the gathering was in the usual locality, *i.e.*, at or near to Shiloh (cf. Josh. xviii. 1, 10; xix. 51; xxi. 2; xxii. 9, 12). Then the angel coming up "from Gilgal" would probably come from the Gilgal near to Shiloh, where the Israelites had so long encamped during the war under Joshua (cf. Preacher's Commentary, pp. 170, 172, 199). It would be sufficiently appropriate that the angel should be seen to come with Jehovah's rebuke from the very place from which the "Angel of His Presence" had gone up with them to mighty and repeated victories (Isa. lxiii. 9; Josh. x. 6–9, 43, xi. 7). The moral significance of the angel being seen to come from Gilgal—thus associated with past help—would be very great. What could be more full of tender historic reproof than that the angel who had, as it were, waited at the warrior's camp to help the faithful, should come from such ground to rebuke the unbelieving and slothful? **To Bochim.**] That this is seen to be on

higher ground than Gilgal, is no proof that the Gilgal was that near Jericho. All the time the site of Bochim is unknown, there is nothing to suggest that this was other than the Gilgal of Deut. xi. 30, and 2 Kings ii. 1, from which Elijah and Elisha went "*down* to Bethel" (וַיֵּרְדוּ בֵּית־אֵל). The LXX. place Bochim near to Bethel, saying that the angel "went up from Galgal to the (place of) weeping, and to Bæthel, and to the house of Israel." Even if this were accepted, Bochim may have been on "the mountain east of Bethel" from whence Abraham obtained so wide an outlook in all directions (Gen. xiii. 14, 15); in which case it might be quite correct, at least of the latter part of the distance, to speak of the angel as going "up to Bochim." Keil, however, points out that this reading of the LXX. "gives no clue whatever." 2. Why have ye done this?] *Lit.*, "*What is this which ye have done?*" Not so much an inquiry as a remonstrance and a chiding. 3. But they shall be as thorns in your sides.] = "But they shall be to you for *adversaries.*" צַד, "*a side,*" *pl.* צִדִּים, is from the root צָדַד, "*to turn oneself,*" "*to oppose oneself,*" to any one. Hence *Chald.* מִצַּד, "*on the side of,*" "*the part of*" (Dan. vi. 5); and לְצַד, "*against the side of*" (Dan. vii. 25). Therefore צִדִּים here should be rendered "adversaries"; otherwise, the expression would stand, "they shall be to you for sides." This makes the various conjectures on this expression unnecessary. Cf. *Gesen.* and *Buxtorf*, jun., who both refer to this verse, and both render צַד, as found here, "an adversary." 5. They sacrificed there unto the Lord.] "This indicates the close proximity of Bochim to Shechem, where the tabernacle was at this time (Josh. xxiv. 25, 26)." [*Speaker's Commentary.*] Keil, however, thinks that "it does not follow from this sacrifice that the tabernacle or the ark of the covenant was to be found at Bochim. In any place where the Lord appeared to the people, sacrifices might be offered to Him (chap. vi. 20, 26, 28; xiii. 16 sqq.; 2 Sam. xxiv. 25). "On the other hand," it is added, "it does follow from the sacrifice at Bochim, where there was no sanctuary of Jehovah, that the person who appeared to the people was not a prophet, nor even an ordinary angel, but *the angel of the Lord*, who is essentially one with Jehovah." 6. And when Joshua had let the people go.] The visit and solemn message of the angel had led to tears. The temporary repentance was so general that the place of the visit was named after the weeping which it had produced. But tears for sin are of small use so long as the sin itself is not put away. Israel remained in league with the tributary Canaanites in spite of the tears. That being so, the sin went on to work out its inevitable calamities and to bring tears which were more abiding. These verses, from Josh. xxiv. 28–31, are therefore quoted to contrast the fidelity of Israel under Joshua with the infidelity of Israel after the death of Joshua, and of his contemporary elders, who had seen the great works of Jehovah. The quotation, therefore, is not only appropriate; it is inserted as giving emphasis to Joshua's influence in the past, as laying an emphasis on God's merciful keeping of His covenant while Israel remained faithful, and thus as giving a fearful emphasis to the facts which this history of the Judges records to show that the beginning of sin is the beginning of sorrows, and that the continuation of sin is their inevitable perpetuation and aggravation also. 7. All the days of the elders.] "No exact term of years is assigned to 'the days of the elders,' which must, therefore, remain uncertain. The length of Joshua's government is also uncertain. If, however, we assume Joshua to have been about the same age as his companion Caleb, as is probable, he would have been just eighty at the entrance into Canaan, and therefore thirty years would bring us to the close of his life. These *elders* would be all that were old enough to take part in the wars of Canaan, according to Judg. iii. 1, 2; and therefore, reckoning from the age of twenty to seventy, we cannot be far wrong in assigning a period of about fifty years from the entrance into Canaan to the death of the elders, or twenty years after the death of Joshua, supposing his government to have lasted thirty years." [*Speaker's Commentary.*] 9. Timnath-heres.] Called in Josh. xix. 50, xxiv. 30, Timnath-serah. Cf. Preacher's Commentary, p. 286. The difference of the names in the original is simply that of a transposition of the letters. 10. Which knew not the Lord.] That is, they knew Him not as their fathers did, who had *seen* so many of Jehovah's mighty works. It is not even meant that they were mentally strangers to the history of God's goodness under Joshua; they knew not God in *their hearts.* They had no love to Him. The word יָדַע is similarly used, in Exod. i. 8, of the king who "knew not Joseph." 11. And served Baalim.] The *pl.* form indicates the different Baalim, or the different characters and modifications under which Baal, the sun-god, was worshipped, rather than the different images of Baal. The singular, Baal = "*lord,*" principally in the sense of *owner* and *possessor.* "When the worshippers wished to express a particular Baal they generally added some particular epithet, as *Baal-zephon*, *Baal-peor*, *Baal-zebub*, *Baal-shamayim*, &c. The two former were adored by the Moabites; *Baal-zebub*, by the Ekronites; *Baal-berith* was honoured at Shechem; and *Baal-shamayim*, the lord of the heavens, was adored among the Phœnicians, Syrians, Chaldeans, &c. Probably among all these people, Baal meant the sun." [*Dr. A. Clarke.*] 13. Ashtaroth.] The *pl.* form of Ashtoreth, the Greek *Astarte.* Solomon followed the impure worship of this idolatry (1 Kings xi. 5, 33; 2 Kings xxiii. 13). "Ashteroth Karnaim points to the horns of the crescent moon, by which also Astarte of Askelon is indicated on the coins of that city (cf. Stark, *Gaza*, p. 259). The

armed Aphrodite in Sparta is the same with Helena or Selene, the moon-goddess, a fact clearly demonstrative of her identity with Astarte. Moon and stars, the luminaries of the night-sky, are blended in Ashtaroth. She represents the collective host of heaven." [*Cassel.*] Thus, Ashtoreth cannot be limited to Venus, but is the moon-goddess, including Venus and the rest of the stars, Ashtoreth of the night thus standing over against Baal of the day. This relation of Ashtoreth to the moon is of importance in understanding Joshua's command for the moon "to stand still," as well as the sun. **15. Whithersoever they went out the hand of the Lord was against them.]** "This is in terrible contrast to what is said in Josh. i. 9." [*Speaker's Com.*] Hence the relevancy and great significance of the quotation in ver. 6–9. **They were greatly distressed.]** *Lit.*, "*And it became to them very narrow.*" וַיֵּצַר, from צוּר, "*to straiten, to press upon, to compress;*" thence, intrans., "*to become straitened*" (cf. chap. x. 9). **16. Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges.]** *Heb.*, "*and the Lord raised,*" &c. This is the first use of the word *shoph'tim*, or judges, from which the book takes its name. **18. For it repented the Lord because of their groanings.]** "Because the Lord had compassion upon their sighing." [*Keil.*] "'The Lord was moved with compassion,' or 'was grieved,' '*because* of their groanings,' as xxi. 15. So, too, Ps. cvi. 45. The sense of repenting which the word (נִחַם) bears, Jon. iii. 9, and elsewhere, is secondary" [*Speaker's Com.*] **19. And it came to pass.]** "*But it* came," &c., the *vau* being taken adversatively. **They ceased not.]** Cf. *Marg.*, "*they let nothing fall of their doings*," *i.e.*, of their wicked doings. LXX., "They abandoned not their devices." **20. And the anger of the Lord.]** This resumes the statement from ver. 14, the intervening passage being a general description of details presently to be mentioned in the main narrative. **21. I also will not henceforth, &c.]** *Lit.*, "I also will not continue to drive out *a man* from before them." This cessation of Jehovah's working is placed over against the want of cessation from evil doings spoken of in verse 19. **23. Therefore the Lord left.]** That is to say, "Therefore the Lord *had* left," &c. He had foreseen this backsliding of Israel (Deut. xxxi. 16–18), and had suffered the Canaanites to rally from the apparently overwhelming defeats of Joshua, in order that they might remain to prove Israel. Thus, as Prof. Steenstra remarks, "the 'not speedily' of Joshua's time had by Israel's faithless apostasy been changed into 'never.'" The impression left by this verse in the A. V. as to not "driving them out *hastily*," is certainly not in harmony with the emphatic statement in ver. 21, that Jehovah would not go on, or add, "to drive out a man" in the future.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Ver. 1–5.

THE INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.—*Verses* 1–4.

The latter half of the previous chapter is a necessary introduction to the opening verses of this. God's messenger of chastisement never appears till our sins have preceded him. The pleasures of sin are the evening twilight which ever comes before the night of Divine punishment. The lurid light of the evening sunset may have its fascinations; for all that, it does but precede the darkness.

This messenger of punishment is none other than "The Messenger of the Covenant" (Mal. iii. 1). This angel is none other than He of whom it has presently to be written, "The Angel of His presence saved them" (Is. lxiii. 9: cf. also, Ex. xiii. 21, xiv. 19, xxiii. 20, 23, xxxii. 34, xxxiii. 14, Num. xx. 16). How passing sad that the messenger who heralds the dark night of human suffering should be He who ever loves to come to us as the Sun of Righteousness! In these five verses we see—

I. **The Lord determinately following His people.** He who in after years said through Hosea, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?" here shews us that the feeling, expressed seven centuries later, was cherished long before it was expressed. Even though the tribes had all turned to sin, He would "hedge up their way with thorns" (Hos. ii. 6), and for this very purpose the Lord Himself, speaking in His own person, now appeared to them (ver. 3). 1. *His purpose at the first was too firmly taken to suffer Him to forsake them now.* The promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had in them no hesitation. The language to Moses, when the work of redemption was beginning, left no place for failure (Exod. vi. 2–8). The Divine miracles against Pharaoh had in them no appearance of faltering. Thus, God is seen following His people, even when they turn almost universally to sin.

2. *He had done too much for them to give them up lightly.* The price of their deliverance from Egypt had been too great to suffer it to be lost. From Goshen right up to Joshua's tomb at Timnath-serah, the way had been lined with miracles and paved with mercy. The price of our redemption has been still more precious. We may look on the "unspeakable gift," and find in that the Divine Amen to the Divine promise, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." 3. *The glory of His name was involved in their failure.* Moses had contemplated the overthrow in the wilderness, and, overcome with horror, he had turned as mediator in strong cryings to his God, saying, "What wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?" So, keeping His name as "the name which is above every name," Jesus Christ is here seen as the angel of reproof at Bochim. Every one of the western tribes, except Issachar, whom Gideon found no better than the rest, is actually named as having departed from the Lord; yet the Lord says here, "My kindness shall not depart from thee." 4. *The love of His heart, had there been nothing else, was sufficient to constrain Him to follow them.* The Divine purpose, the miracles, and the committing of His glorious name in some measure to men, had all proceeded from the Divine love. These things were but the streams; the love of Jehovah was the fountain from which all of them had flowed forth unto men. The purpose of God to save, and His unfailing covenant; miracles like those of the manna, the flowing water, the divided sea and river, the falling walls of Jericho, and the victory at Beth-horon: all these, and many similar mercies, are fit themes for glad and holy song. Yet he thinks most wisely, and is likely to sing most continuously and sweetly, who finds in all spoken promises and visible favours so many evidences of the changeless love of the living God. His mercies are precious, but His priceless love which can repeat them all again, and multiply them to meet our utmost need, is more precious still. It was in the living love of Jehovah that the cause was to be found of this gracious visit to Bochim.

II. **Rebuke emphatically attending on sin.** The words of the Angel are all words of rebuke (vers. 1-3). Yet how calm is the rebuke. It has in it no haste, and no passion. Every word is terrible with truth and gentleness. We have here:—1. *Rebuke set in the overpowering light of past mercies.* (*a*) *The Angel reminded them of deliverance from bondage.* "I made you go up out of Egypt." The hole of the pit whence they were digged was brought before them. The rugged quarry whence they were hewn was recalled to thought. (*b*) *The Angel reminded them of mercies on the way.* "And have brought you unto the land." These mercies are not enumerated in this record. They may have been alluded to in detail, but even this general reference to them contributed to tears. He thinks but poorly of sin who does not contemplate it in view of what God has done to deliver him from its power and sorrow. (*c*) *The Angel reminded them of the unalterable covenant.* "The land which I sware unto your fathers." Their fathers had been encouraged by the unfailing promises of God, which had been solemnly given to three successive generations through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The covenant with the fathers had been renewed unto the children: "I said I will never break my covenant with you." This covenant, however, from the first, included the condition of Israel's obedience (Gen. xvii. 7-14). God never did break that covenant, even when Israel was carried away to Babylon, or when the Romans overthrew Jerusalem. (*d*) *The Angel "came up from Gilgal."* He laid emphasis upon all the mercy of the past by coming visibly from the place of the old encampment, from which He had so often gone forth with Joshua and the host to mighty victories. Probably Bochim was near to Shiloh, or Bethel (chap. xxi. 19), and the site of the camp at Gilgal lay between them, so that the Angel might have been actually seen by the festive host coming from the very place from

which they had so often been led out to ever successful war. What rebuke could possibly be more keen? Here were men both pleading their inability to cope with iron chariots, and yet putting their enemies under tribute. The tribute itself was answer enough to the plea about the chariots. But, as if it were not enough, the Angel of Jehovah comes up from the place from which Israel had never obediently gone forth to a single lost battle. The present wicked unbelief was exposed in a light which might well make the place a place of shame and tears. God was saying with dramatic and irresistible force, "I have been thy helper, but under the shadow of My wings thou will not rejoice." The reproofs of the Lord are ever overwhelming. When He undertakes to rebuke, the name of the place where He so appears to us must needs henceforth be Bochim. "Will He plead against me with His great power?" 2. *Rebuke sustained by the proof of direct disobedience.* "Why have ye done this?" or, "What is this which ye have done?" Evidences of *the league* were visible all through the land. The enemies of God and truth were living in peace among the people of God. It may have been that some of them were even now present with the multitude. The altars of the idolaters were not thrown down. There they still stood, visibly, in the midst of the people of every tribe. "Why have ye done this?" When Christ, the Mediator, pleads against us, who shall answer? 3. *Rebuke pointing to coming sorrow.* "They shall be adversaries to you (cf. Crit. Notes), and their gods shall be a snare unto you." The Lord's rebuke is not vain and empty. It ever brings forth bitter fruit. "What is this that thou hast done?" when spoken to Eve, is followed by, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow." "What hast thou done?" when asked of Cain, does but precede the terrible words, "And now thou art cursed from the earth." To Moses and Aaron the Lord said, "Ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel;" and the Lord also added, "Therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." David heard Nathan say, "Thou art the man," and forthwith the sentence followed, "The sword shall never depart from thine house" . . . "The child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." Similarly, sentence follows rebuke all through the Scriptures. Yet are we encouraged to say, "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared."

III. Tears, from the first, accompanying rebuke. "All the people lifted up their voice and wept." 1. *Weeping, for the most part, has to do with sin.* The sources of the Nile may have to be sought many a year; the place where the river of tears takes its rise may generally be found at once, and without mistakes. The well-head of human sorrow is seldom far removed from the mountain-foot of human guilt. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." When the tribes of humanity gather at some Bochim, there is ever something wrong as to their respective inheritances. 2. *It is a mercy when the sinful can weep.* Our truest tears are the venting of our guilt. Without tears for sin, sin would petrify in our nature; it would assimilate every holier emotion to itself, and then turn all to stone. It was of men who had experienced this that Paul wrote as "being past feeling." Many about us now would be thus hardened, but for the tender power of Divine grace. The Angel of the Covenant appears, and forthwith the place of sin and formal religious festivity becomes a Bochim. "God is able of *these stones* to raise up children unto Abraham." Thanks be unto God who is able, that He is also willing! Rowland Hill used to say, "Repentance is so sweet a companion, that my only regret in going to heaven is, that I shall leave her behind and know her no more." This is hardly a wise lament. As long as sin is with us, tears are a sweet because a necessary relief; but "no more sin" must be far better than sin and tears. We may be devoutly thankful that it is written of the saints in heaven, "God shall wipe

away all tears from their eyes;" we ought to be no less thankful that no hand ever altogether wipes away the tears from the sinful eyes of earth. There, tears would be an unmeaning pain; here, they are a necessity. An old poet, more than two centuries ago, wrote tenderly and beautifully on the tears of Mary Magdalene at the tomb:

"Not in the Evening's eyes,
When they red with weeping are
For the Sun that dies;
Sits Sorrow with a face so fair.
Nowhere but here did ever meet
Sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet.

"Sadness, all the while
She sits on such a throne as this,
Can do nought but smile,
Nor believes she Sadness is:
Gladness itself would be more glad,
(Thus) to be made so sweetly sad."

[*Richard Crashaw*, 1646.]

Sadness which mourns the loss of Christ's presence, or of His Spirit, must needs be among the keenest sorrows of earth; but the sadness which has suffered this loss, and has not mourned it, must presently be the bitterest sorrow of all. 3. *Weeping is of small use to the sinful, if they only weep.* Bochim is of no avail unless it leads to the breaking of all leagues with idolaters, and to the throwing down of all forbidden altars. Tears must be followed by a reformation; otherwise, they are a useless pain.

IV. Punishment inevitably succeeding the tears in which there is no amendment of life. This whole book of the Judges is God's comment on the folly of weeping without truly repenting. Emerson has written: "Crime and punishment grow out of one stem. Punishment is a fruit that, unsuspected, ripens within the flower of the pleasure which concealed it. Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end pre-exists in the means, the fruit in the seed." There is no separating between sin and its *natural* punishment; unless there be true repentance, there is no separating between sin and its Divine punishment. Nineveh is spared; the thief enters Paradise; Saul "obtains mercy;" but the weepers of Bochim have their history, for centuries, written in bitter chastisements. As that Cornish proverb, so sentient of a rock-bound shore, puts the matter: "He who will not be ruled by the rudder must be ruled by the rock." So he who will not be led to serve Jehovah by "the Angel of the Lord," must be driven to seek God indeed by the chastening hand of Canaanites and Philistines.

OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

God's Reproof of Sin.—*Verses* 1–5.

I. Sin confronted by the Lord in person. The Angel of the Lord was none other than the Lord Himself (cf. above). 1. *God confronts the guilty in mercy.* If He did not come to trouble the sinful, they might well despair. God came through His messengers to guilty Saul, to David, to Nebuchadnezzar. When the Lord answered Saul no more, the end was nigh. When the Saviour said to Judas, "What thou doest do quickly," the bitterness of death was not distant. God's silence should be interpreted by the guilty as the noise of coming judgment. "I kept silence," is immediately followed by "I will reprove thee (Ps. l. 21). 2. *When God so confronts the guilty, none can answer.* Throughout this brief narrative the only voice that is heard is the voice of the Lord. The sinful, like guilty children, can only answer

by their tears. Job cried, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him. . . . I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments;" yet even Job in that awful Presence could only say, "Now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

II. Sin manifested by the greatness of Divine mercy. 1. *Mercies of deliverance from bondage.* "I made you to go up out of Egypt." 2. *Mercies of promised help.* "The land which I sware unto your fathers." "I said I will never break My covenant with you." 3. *Mercies of actual inheritance.* "I have brought you unto the land."

III. Sin exposed, and the proofs visible on every hand. The league had been made with the inhabitants. The altars still stood throughout the land. "Ye have not obeyed My voice." The law was even then engraven on the stones at Ebal; the *book* of the law was already written (Josh. viii. 31, 32). There was no disputing either what the Lord's voice had been, or that it had been disobeyed. Who can answer when God contends with him on account of sin? If God be against us, who can be for us?

IV. Sin the shadow of coming sorrow. "They shall be adversaries to you," &c. Our departures from the way of the Lord ever originate in the heart. The actual commission of sin is the point of contact in the beginning of the eclipse which hides from us the Sun of Righteousness, and the hiding of His face is ever the beginning of darkness. "Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled."

V. Sin lamented, but not forsaken. "The people lifted up their voice, and wept." They also offered sacrifice unto the Lord, but they did not put away the transgression. God cannot be reconciled to men who do not forsake iniquity. "Blessed is he whose sin is *covered;*" but no tears and no amount of sacrifice can cover the sin which is still persisted in. The Hebrew word כפר "*to cover,*" "*to expiate*" sin, is also used in the Old Testament for *a village.* A village was so called because it afforded *shelter*, or *a cover*, for the inhabitants. Sacrifice can afford no dwelling-place and no covering to the man who continues in his sin. Even Calvary leaves the soul in all its wickedness, "Naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do," so long as sin is not forsaken. He who comes to the sacrifice of Christ with such tears as lead him to turn from iniquity, will find that his sin is covered, and that Christ is as a City of Refuge.

Divine Visitations.—*Verses* 1–5.

I. The time of the Lord's visitation. When disobedience was at its height. II. The method of the Lord's visitation. He was seen to come "from Gilgal," the place of much past help. III. The spirit of the Lord's visitation. He came in tender and loving reproof. IV. The influence of the Lord's visitation. The Israelites shed tears, called the name of that place 'The Weepers,' and offered sacrifice; yet, with all this, they "knew not the day of their visitation" as they should have done.

The Time of God's Manifested Help.—*Verse* 1.

I. God comes to men in the sorrow of that bondage wherein they were born. "I made you go up out of Egypt."

II. God manifests Himself freely to His delivered children so long as they are faithful. The Pillar of Cloud; the Red Sea, &c.

III. God is nigh at hand in all hours of weakness and need. The passage of the Jordan; Jericho, Bethhoron; the waters of Merom.

IV. God is full of long-suffering, even when His people sin. The alternating plagues and miracles in the wilderness. The gracious manifestation at Bochim.

THE ANGEL OF THE COVENANT.—*Verse* 1.

I. The Angel of the Divine Presence (Exod. xiii. 21; xiv. 19). **II. The Angel of gracious promise** (Exod. xxiii. 20–25; xxxii. 34; xxxiii. 2). **III. The Angel of previous help** (Exod. xiv. 24–30; Numb. xx. 16; Josh. v. 14). **IV. The Angel of severe rebuke** (Exod. xxiii. 21; and verses 1–3). **V. The Angel of deliverances yet to come** (Judg. vi. 11–23; xiii. 9–20). **VI. The Angel of perpetuated song** (Ps. xxxiv. 7; Is. lxiii. 9).

DIVINE REMEMBRANCES.—*Verse* 1.

I. God's remembrance of what we were. He knew Israel as having come up "out of Egypt." "He found him in a desert land," and the land had not been forgotten. God always remembers where He found us, and what we were.

II. God's remembrance of the deliverances which He has wrought for us. "I made you to go up out of Egypt." The Lord has daily in view all the help He has ever given to us. He knows where He helped us unsought. He sees, no less, where we have reached forth a secret hand to touch the hem of His garment; and knows all the virtue which has come forth to us. How great must our sin appear in the eyes of Him who sees all His mercy and our guilt at one glance!

III. God's remembrance of His promises after they are fulfilled. He who had sworn to the fathers, and fulfilled His words to the children, forgat neither the one nor the other. God knows every promise that has ever been fulfilled to us each. He knows some promises as having been fulfilled to us many times. He who makes His promises all "Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus," knows also how many times we have found them thus abiding and helpful.

IV. God's remembrance of the relation between our past and our present. God who remembered the bondage of Egypt, and saw His people now in possession of Canaan, had every step from the one to the other perfectly under His gaze. He had made them to "go up out of Egypt;" He also had "brought them into the land" which they now had for an inheritance.

V. God's remembrance of His covenant. "I said, I will never break my covenant with you." Many a broken promise of our fellows puts the best of them to shame: God can always look upon His word in holy satisfaction that not one jot or tittle of it has ever passed away. It is not a little imposing to find our attention challenged as to God's faithfulness at the very place where God was about to depart from the people who had already departed from Him. We cry, "Stablish Thy word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused him to hope;" but God's unestablished words are ever because we have got where they can no longer be fulfilled. We break the covenant, and then wonder at the fragments; but the fragments are of our making, not of our Heavenly Father's.

"FROM GILGAL TO BOCHIM."

If Bochim was at Shiloh, or near Bethel, as is probable, it would be utterly inappropriate to anything which the assembled Israelites *could observe*, to speak of the Angel as coming from Gilgal, in the Arabah, near Jericho, to Bochim, near Shiloh. The historian evidently means to convey the impression that the Angel came from Gilgal, or from the direction of Gilgal, *in the sight of all Israel*. If the Gilgal near Jericho were meant, it could be alto-

gether irrelevant thus to speak of a place more than twenty miles distant.

In a volume very recently published, Dr. Edersheim makes the following remarks on this question:—"From this solemn transaction (at Mount Ebal), the Israelites moved, as we gather from Josh. ix. 6, to Gilgal, where they seem to have formed a permanent camp. The mention of this place in Deut. xi. 30, where it is described as 'beside the oaks of Moreh,' that is, near the spot of Abraham's first altar (Gen. xii. 7), implies a locality well known at the time, and, as we might almost conjecture from its after-history, a sort of traditional sanctuary. This alone would suffice to distinguish this Gilgal from the first encampment of Israel as east of Jericho, which only obtained its name from the event which there occurred. Besides, it is impossible to suppose that Joshua marched to the banks of the Jordan (Josh. ix. 6; x. 6, 7, 9, 15, 43); and, again, that he did so a second time, after the battles in Galilee, to make appointment of the land among the people by the banks of the Jordan (Josh. xiv. 6). Further, the localisation of Gilgal near the banks of the Jordan would be entirely incompatible with what we know of the after-history of that place. Gilgal was one of the three cities where Samuel judged the people (1 Sam. vii. 16; here, also, he offered sacrifices when the Ark was no longer in the tabernacle at Shiloh (1 Sam. x. 8; xiii. 7–9; xv. 21), and there, as in a central sanctuary, did all Israel gather to renew their allegiance to Saul (1 Sam. xi. 14). Later on, Gilgal was the great scene of Elisha's ministry (2 Kings ii. 1), and still later it became a centre of idolatrous worship (Hosea iv. 15; ix. 15; xii. 11; Amos iv. 4; v. 5). All these considerations lead to the conclusion that the Gilgal which formed the site of Joshua's encampment is the modern Jiljilieh, a few miles from Shiloh, and about the same distance from Bethel—nearly equidistant from Shechem and from Jerusalem." ["*Israel in Canaan*," *pp.* 75, 76.]

This entirely agrees with the view advocated in our treatment of the respective passages in Joshua. The great importance of the point in question, not only geographically, but as it affects far more serious considerations, will probably be deemed sufficient to justify this insertion of Dr. Edersheim's valuable corroborative notice.

Limitations of Liberty before God and Men.—*Verses* 2, 3.

If, as some have contended, this and the preceding chapter belonged "to the early part of Joshua's government," then these two verses would be utterly at variance with all that we are told of Joshua's faithfulness, and would stand in direct contradiction to Josh. xxiv. 31, and to verse 7. The verses confront us with the fact that no man has liberty to disobey God, or to practise or tolerate in others such wickedness as is in violation of the rights of others, even though this wickedness be taught in the name of religion.

I. Fellowship with the wicked is enmity with God. "Ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land." God claims the right to say with whom His children shall associate. We claim such authority over our children. We are not our own. We have been redeemed from bondage by God. The very conditions of our redemption required that we should form no league with the enemies of Him who gave us freedom. To ally ourselves with God's enemies is to become enemies ourselves.

II. The tolerance of some forms of so-called religion is an infringement of human liberty. "Ye shall throw down their altars." A great many altars in this world have been thrown down by a persecuting despotism. There are some altars which even the God of all liberty demands that we utterly abolish. The Canaanites were religious teachers of fornication and murder (cf. Deut. xii. 31; 1 Kings xi. 7, 33; 2 Kings iii. 27; xvi. 3; Ps.

cvi. 37, 38; Is. lvii. 5, &c). Their religion was an overt and shameful attack on the most sacred and inherent rights of the whole human race. In such a case, toleration is out of the question. Reckless advocates of liberty might far more consistently plead for the toleration of a poisonous factory which gave off fatal vapours in the midst of a populous community. America has long hesitated as to tolerating in her midst systematic adultery under the sheltering name of Mormonism. Probably the public conscience in the United States will ere long demand that the evil be swept away. But suppose Mormonism should add to adultery the wholesale offering of human sacrifices. In that case, every true man must feel that the evil creed of sin and blood must at once be wiped out in blood. The personal faith of every man should be tolerated so long as his faith does no gross wrong to the faith and liberty of others; but when vice and murder are labelled religion, no real lover of liberty will submit to be duped by a mere name. The rights and liberties of sufferers must also be respected. There was nothing to be done but that God should command the overthrow of altars which were set apart to vice like this. For men who had begun to enter into the liberty wherewith God makes free, the only possible course was that they should be instructed to kill off from the face of the earth organised religious teachers and doers of wholesale murder and incessant fornication. "Free and independent thought," in which partial men of a certain bias love to indulge, has seldom perpetrated any anti-climax more ridiculous than the hundreds which, in modern days, it has pronounced against this painful but necessary destruction of the Canaanites. He who contends for a liberty which has to be nurtured daily in the blood and purity of multitudes of helpless children, is either a terrible despot towards the children, or beyond the reach of all ordinary argument. Of what matter is it that the worshippers of Molech should call the screams of his burning child "acceptable to his god," or the corpse of his murdered son or daughter "a religious sacrifice." Should any congregation of such worshippers be found in England to-morrow, every citizen worthy of the name would demand that they be exterminated, or made to abjure their horrible faith.

III. To disregard the voice of God is to incur the reproof and correction both of God and men. 1. *God calls the disobedient to account.* "Ye have not obeyed my voice. Why have ye done this?" 2. *Victory ceases with fidelity.* "I will not drive them out from before you." The triumphs at Jericho, and Gibeon, and over the host of Jabin, were all won when the Israelites were little used to war. Sihon and Og were conquered when the army had little discipline and almost no military experience. In the day of Canaan's might and Israel's weakness, the latter was everywhere triumphant. When the people were weak then were they strong. In the day of Israel's strength and Canaan's feebleness, Israel could win no more battles. He who fails to obey God, must not wonder if he fails everywhere. 3. *God's enmity takes form in the enmity of men.* "They shall be to you for adversaries." God has many instruments of correction, and He not seldom uses our fellow-creatures for this purpose. Many instances of this are found in the Old Testament. May not this form of Divine correction be common now? Said a popular teacher of the past generation, when vexed with disturbances in the church over which he presided, "My sins are reappearing to me in the form of men."

IV. Disobedience to God is a seed of temptation to yet more disobedience. "Their gods shall be a snare unto you." It may be said of all sin as it was said of vegetable life on the morning of creation—"Whose seed is in itself." The man who transgresses sows sin in his own heart, and, alas! the seed is naturally fruitful, and the ground naturally fertile. He who has lived

long in sin need not wonder that the way of holiness is difficult. By grace we are saved. The gods whom she formerly served would ensnare the Church to her ruin now, were it not that the God of gods still graciously says, "Behold, I will allure her!" He who has been lifted up from the earth, was lifted up to draw us from the sin which many previous sins had made too fascinating for us to forsake alone. "No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw him." Whatever occult doctrinal meanings may or may not be concealed in these emphatic words of the Son of God, the natural enslaving power of sin needs the full weight of that awful utterance to rightly depict the weakness in which sin leaves us all. Every sinful man re-writes in his own history the ancient word of Jehovah—"Thou hast destroyed thyself; in Me is thine help." The gods of our old idolatries have surrounded us by too many snares for us ever to be able to escape them alone.

Broken Commandments.—*Verse* 2.

God's commandments are written so plainly upon the tables of Scripture, and man's violation of them appears so clearly upon the tables of life, that when the Lord begins to expose sin, conviction must certainly and immediately follow.

The dangers of adversity may be great, but so also are the dangers of prosperity. When the Israelites were without any experience of either war or victory, they overthrew Sihon and Og, and went on to victories yet greater: when they had won the land, then they began to lose it, through love of ease and fear of iron chariots.

Mighty works of God may fail to make His servants believe, and successive years of mercy may find them increasingly ungrateful; but when the goodness of the Lord is no longer sufficient, then rebuke and chastisement at once become necessary.

Many victories often lead God's people to think lightly of winning more. The vast importance of the divine commandments becomes obscured by the illusive light of unbroken triumphs, and a rich earthly inheritance.

The light which comes to us through adversity is often the clearest and purest that we get. So it was with the Israelites. The proof of this is again and again set before us in their history under the judges. To use the magnificent image of Edmund Burke, on a political occasion,—The light broke in upon them, "not through well-contrived and well-disposed windows, but through flaws and breaches; through the yawning chasms of their national ruin."

The Inexcusableness of Sin.—*Verse* 2, *last clause.*

I. **The sin which is done in duties which are left undone.** "Why have ye done this?" Only one of these three charges has to do with sins of commission; the other two speak of sins of omission. The league with the idolaters was a transgression actual and positive; for the rest of the accusation, the altars had *not* been thrown down, and the Divine voice had *not* been obeyed. Yet the Angel says of all these things alike, "Why have ye *done* this?" The duties which we do not are sins which we do. Our very sins of omission are full of commission. Every altar which the Israelites suffered to stand would be a wrong actually done to the land generally, and to every child in each family. We should remember that our very neglect to obey God becomes an actual and positive wrong to men.

II. **The silence of the sinner in the presence of his Divine Judge.** "Why have ye done this?" No answer is given. Not a word of excuse seems to have been uttered. How awful and

significant is this silence! What emphasis it lays on the righteousness of the Judge's accusation! How clearly it manifests the guilt of the accused! Here is a nation of transgressors, and not one man can make reply. It will be so with many at the last judgment. "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless." There is nothing to be said for sin. It is put to silence by Divine majesty; for who shall answer God. It is put to silence by Divine mercies; common gratitude ought to have led to obedience. It is put to silence by Divine willingness to help; all the idolatrous altars which men are too weak to throw down alone, may be thrown down by the ever-willing arm of God.

III. The poor answer which the sinner must make if he were to answer truthfully. "Why have ye done this?" 1. *For ease, and been disappointed.* Their unwrest was even now beginning in these tears. 2. *For fear, and had to fear more.* The undestroyed iron chariots were the commencement of an iron yoke. 3. *For gain, and have to suffer loss.* The men who were spared under tribute to cultivate the fat lands which the tribes were too idle to tend themselves, would soon take the produce of the lands, and in their turn exact tribute from the Israelites. 4. *For peace, and have found ourselves at war with man, with God, and even with our own consciences.* All these things were beginning, and would soon be fully felt. "The way of transgressors is hard." He who seeks to spare himself or please himself by disobeying God, inherits all he would avoid, and loses all he would obtain.

Sins of Omission.—*Verse* 2.

I. Their great magnitude. We are apt to think that great sins are only those which we actually commit. This is a mistake. We see here the following serious forms of transgression: 1. *Disobedience to God's will.* 2. *Disbelief in God's Word.* 3. *Man's judgment preferred before God's unerring wisdom.*

II. Their fearful consequences. 1. *A troubled conscience.* 2. *An encumbered inheritance.* 3. *An open door made for temptation.* 4. *A fruitful source of conflict.* "From henceforth thou shalt have wars" (2 Chron. xvi. 9). 5. *Ultimate overthrow and captivity.* This is seen in the repeated subjection of Israel under the judges, and in the great captivity at Babylon. All began here, nor did it end there. 6. *The removal of the privileges of worship.* Shiloh was associated with Ichabod (chap. xviii. 30, 31; 1 Sam. iv. 21, 22); the ark was taken to Philistia; the temple, later on, was utterly destroyed.

III. Their tremendous warnings. All this Old Testament narrative is not given merely for information. God seeks something higher than the satisfaction of our curiosity. Nor is the record only or principally for interest. The Holy Spirit meant to give us something more than an exciting history. "All these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

"The accusation against them at Bochim was negative rather than positive. There are degrees of guilt in the rebellions of the Church against her Head; and as yet the Israelites were not charged, like Ahab afterwards, with doing very abominably in following idols: still less had they reached the villainy of Manasseh at a yet later period, who even 'overpassed the deeds of the heathen,' for he 'did wickedly above all the Amorites did, which were before him, and shed innocent blood till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.' It is true that their downward course, after they had once placed themselves on the smooth deceitful gradient, soon became

rapid and headlong; but as yet they are expostulated with chiefly for sins of omission.

"When the Church has begun to habitually neglect any one of her Lord's known commands—still more when she begins to 'break one of these least commandments, and teach men so'—the day is not far distant when, unless arrested in her career by the mercy or judgments of God, she will be found openly consorting with the mammon-worshippers by whom she is surrounded. . . . From sparing the lives of the enemies of the Church, it was an easy step to make comfortable agreements with them.

"The evening twilight soon fades into total darkness; so their negative evil soon degenerated into positive revolt: 'they did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim.'" [*Luke H. Wiseman, M.A.*]

"Sins of commission are usual punishments for sins of omission. He that leaves a duty may fear to be left to commit a crime." [*Gurnall.*]

"We may lose heaven by neutrality as well as by hostility, by wanting oil as well as by drinking poison. An unprofitable servant shall as much be punished as a prodigal son. Undone duty will undo souls. The last words of the industrious Archbishop Usher were, 'Lord, in special, forgive me my sins of omission.'"

"Love puts not off the pursuit of duty till it attains the possession of glory. There is no rocking this babe to sleep but in the cradle of the grave." [*Wm. Secker.*]

No League to be made with God's Enemies.—*Verse* 2.

"It is perilous work when men begin to decide who are believers and who are not, if they decide by party badges. . . . Nevertheless, there is an irreligion which he who runs may read. For the atheist is not merely he who professes unbelief, but, strictly speaking, every one who lives without God in the world. And the heretic is not merely he who has mistaken some Christian doctrine, but rather he who causes divisions among the brethren. And the idolater is not merely he who worships images, but he who gives his heart to something which is less than God; for a man's god is that which has his whole soul and worship, that which he obeys and reverences as his highest. Now there are innumerable doubtful cases where charity is bound to hope the best; but there is also an abundance of plain cases: for where a man's god is money, or position in society, or rank, there the rule holds, 'Come ye apart.'" [*F. W. Robertson, M.A., Lectures on Corinthians, p.* 358.]

"In every age the Church of Go has to drive out her spiritual Amorites—Unbelief, Ungodliness, Heresy, Idolatry, the setting up of man's inventions and forms in place of the pure truth of God; and unless she is diligent and bold these enemies will beleaguer her and infest her, and will at length drive her out of her inheritance. These are the enemies who will dispute with the heirs of promise every foot of their expected heritage. With these it is no child's play at arms, but a veritable struggle for life; for as the spies reported of the sons of Anak, which come of the giants, 'We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight'—so these bold gigantic foes are not afraid of the utmost efforts the believer can put forth by the mere force of his own will." [*L. H. Wiseman, M.A.*]

The Punishment of Sin a Punishment in Kind.—*Verse* 3.

I. Men neglecting God, and having to hear that God will neglect them. The "Ye have not" of the people, is met by the "I will not" of God. Men omit duties, and the Lord omits help. God does not threaten the

Israelites with His enmity; He simply declares that He will leave those who have so sinfully left Him. Forsaking is punished by forsaking.

II. Men making a league with the wicked, and finding that their chosen confederates are to become their direst foes. "They shall be to you for adversaries" (cf. Critical Notes). The point of departure becomes the place of chastisement. Those for whom God had been cast off, should be God's instruments to turn that unhallowed choice into the chief cause of mourning. It is ever thus: Delilah is generally chosen to shear Samson; Gehazi lies to the healed leper, and buys the cast-off leprosy; Judas covenants with the priests, and has to hear them say in his anguish, "See thou to that;" Saul of Tarsus allies himself with the Jews to persecute Christians, and forthwith his future history is one of continued perils by his "own countrymen," and "perils among false brethren."

III. Men preserving idolatrous altars, and ensnared by idol gods. "Their gods shall be a snare unto you." The altars which they spared, contrary to the command of God, became the future place of their own sacrifice. No man can afford to keep what God would have him to destroy. All our forbidden possessions, so far from being assets in the account of our individual happiness, had better at once be entered as debts which will certainly have to be paid. To strike them off the account as items which cannot be realised, is only half the loss; they must be put *on the other side*. The gods that we spare are not only helpless and useless; they are a snare: The altars that we leave standing not only bring us none of the joy of worship; they require us as a sacrifice.

Causes of Spiritual Weakness.

"The history illustrates the causes of the weakness of the Church and people of God.

"I. One of these causes was indolence. . . . Patient labour there must be, if we would win the prize of our high calling. The athlete cannot retain his strength without daily exercise; the vocalist cannot retain his power and command of voice without incessant practice; and the child of God cannot go on to perfection without a daily spiritual gymnastic 'exercising himself with a view to godliness' (1 Tim. iv. 7 *Gr.*), as an athlete with a view to the games. Faith and love, correcting the indolence of our nature, will make this holy toil delightful. In the second century it passed into a proverb, when men would express the impossibility of a thing, to say, 'You may as well take off a Christian from Christ;' and our blessed Master, whose example is the most perfect rebuke of slothfulness, declared that it was His meat and drink, not merely to begin, not merely to carry on, but to finish His Father's work.

"II. Another cause of spiritual weakness is a secret love of sin. The Israelites found in the habits of the men of Canaan much that was congenial to their own corrupt inclinations. . . . In religious families there are sons and daughters who, although outwardly restrained by the circumstances of their position, cherish a bitter hatred of religion, and a secret love for a dissipated life. And even in the hearts of the faithful, what strange occasional lingerings there are towards evil! What treacherous trifling with things forbidden! What hovering about the devil's ground! What secret inclinations to taste the poisoned cup! What strange revival, at times, of the power of old habits which we had imagined subdued for ever! What infatuated dancing on the brink of hell, like the moth fluttering round the candle to its destruction! Who can explain the depth of

that hidden treason? Who can disclose the inner sources of that secret alienation from the adorable God, that lusting of the flesh against the spirit, which so many of the faithful mourn? 'Never,' says Calvin, 'does the love of piety sufficiently flourish in our hearts unless it begets in us a hatred of sin.'

"III. Another cause of spiritual weakness is unbelief, if indeed this one cause does not sum up and exhaust the whole subject. Unbelief is vitally connected with that alienation of heart and affections from God, in which the deepest ruin of man consists. . . . Here is the great secret of unbelief—it is 'the evil heart departing from the living God.'" [*Luke H. Wiseman, M.A.*]

The Power of the Lord's Word.—*Verses* 4, 5.

From the fact that "all the children of Israel" are here spoken of, Bishop Patrick says, "By this it appears they were all met at some solemn festival, as they were bound to do three times every year, for otherwise it cannot be conceived what should occasion such an assembly of the whole congregation, and consequently the place where these words were spoken to them was Shiloh." Probably this was so (cf. Exod. xxiii. 14–17; Deut. xii. 10–14). If so, we see in the very circumstances of this gathering these three things: 1. *The formal services of religion carefully observed notwithstanding gross sin.* With heathen altars all around them, with a league recently made with idolaters, and with the broken words of God coming between the Most High and their service, the Israelites met to worship Him whose will they had so utterly ignored. What a picture it presents of many a subsequent religious service! 2. *God refusing to accept service spoiled by disobedience, and wanting the worship of the heart.* That the service was not accepted, follows from the words of the Angel. And yet, while God rejects the worship He does not at once forsake the worshipper. Just as at the beginning Divine mercy gently reasons with Cain as to his rejected offering, so does that mercy here tenderly remonstrate with the formal worshippers at Bochim. Here, also, we see a Father who "knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust." 3. *A festive gathering of the Lord's people turned into an assembly of "weepers."* God loves to make His people joyful in His house of prayer, but there is much that is more important than our gladness. As has been said of the children of Dan, even "in Aijalon, the place where Joshua had commanded the sun to stand still; so far from being animated by the memory of their leader's faith, they were actually driven back by the heathen and forced to take shelter in the mountains (chap. i. 34, 35), thus turning the noblest battle-field of the Church of God into a scene of defeat and shame." Similar evidences of unfaithfulness were apparent all through the land. The worship of the congregation might well be turned into weeping. When the heavens are brass, and our prayer will not pass through, it is meet that we make search for idol altars, and break away from sinful leagues.

This assembly at Bochim dissolved into tears by the message of the Angel, may suggest to us the following considerations:—

I. **The power of the word of the Lord to work conviction.** "The people lifted up their voice and wept." As was written to the Hebrews of a later generation, "The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," Heb. iv. 12). As heard on this occasion, this word—1. *Reveals the love of God.* It tells of His loving acts in the past. It declares, no less, His tender concern in the present, and His care for His people's future. 2. *It makes manifest the sins of men.* It spares no one. The leaders of the people are exposed even more

than the mass. It is the glory of the Bible that it has no respect to persons. The sins of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, and Peter, are as fully revealed as are the sins of Amnon, Absalom, Gehazi, or Ananias and Sapphira. King or peasant, child of God or openly wicked, the word of the Lord declares and judges sin wherever it is found. 3. *It displays the sinner's base ingratitude.* It throws the strong light of God's past love and goodness on the dark evidences of man's idolatrous sympathies. It "discerneth the thoughts and intents of the heart," which after being made glad by God, wickedly turns against God. How many has it thus judged and condemned! What multitudes it is so condemning even to this day! 4. *It proclaims coming punishment.* Men argue against its penalties as being unlike the God whom it declares, but the Bible still goes on speaking in its awful calmness about the "worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched." Blessed be God for the faithful word! It shows that God has not given up as hopeless the sinful men to whom, through it, He still comes with words of rebuke and exhortation. Let the hands that so often hang down be lifted up to preach it, well assured that "it is the power of God unto salvation." People still weep when they hear the words of the law of the Lord (cf. Neh. viii. 9).

II. **Conviction expressing itself through tears.** "The people lifted up their voice and wept." The weeping seems to have been very general. Unless very many had been in tears, we should not have been told that the people wept, nor would the place have been named "The Weepers." 1. *Tears must ever follow sin.* They may come as tears of genuine grief for sin. They may be delayed till sin brings punishment. In one way or the other they must certainly succeed the transgression of God's righteous laws. Every sinner is a debtor to grief, and sooner or later the bill must be met. The longer payment is deferred, the worse for the debtor, for the interest charged on overdue tears for sin is always both high and compound. Emerson says: "The ingenuity of man has always been dedicated to the solution of one problem,—how to detach the sensual sweet, the sensual strong, the sensual bright, &c., from the moral sweet, the moral deep, the moral fair; that is, again, to contrive to cut clean off this upper surface so thin as to leave it bottomless; to get a *one end* without an *other end*. . . . This dividing and detaching is steadily counteracted. Up to this day, it must be owned, no projector has had the smallest success. The parted water reunites behind our hand. We can no more halve things and get the sensual good by itself, than we can get an inside that shall have no outside, or a light without a shadow. 'Drive out Nature with a fork, she comes running back.'" Natural law alone exacts, unfailingly, the due penalties of sin; and behind Nature, and working through Nature, stands God, "Who will by no means clear the guilty." He who chooses the pleasures of sin for a season will also in due season have to take its pains. It is well that this is so. If sin could be committed without tears, to use a paradox, it would be more full of tears than ever. The sorrow that multiplies upon itself and cannot weep, has need to weep indeed. 2. *Tears are necessary till sin is put away.* Sir Walter Scott wrote of the comparatively innocent tears of children,—

> "The tear down childhood's cheek that flows,
> Is like the dewdrop on the rose:
> When next the summer breeze comes by,
> And waves the bush, the flower is dry."

God has mercifully ordered it that the tears that flow for iniquity shall not be dried so quickly. In heaven, where there is no more sin, God wipes away all tears with His own hand. He will love us there no more than He loves us here. He leaves us in tears here, simply because we have too much sin to do without them. 3. *Tears for sin, nevertheless, are often only temporary.* Men dry their own eyes, and harden

their own hearts, when God would see them still weeping. "Bochim" is not mentioned again throughout the Scriptures. The tears of these transgressors were of short duration. The tears, and the name of the place where they shed them, were alike soon forgotten. The forgiven man rejoices that tears are put away, and exclaims, —"Sing psalms to Jehovah, ye His saints, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness. Because His anger is for a moment, His favour for a life-time; weeping may tarry in the evening, but at morning there is joy" (cf. Heb. Ps. xxx. 5, 6).—The unforgiven man has need to weep again that his tears are dried all too soon. 4. *Tears are most hopeful when most hidden.* "They called the name of that place Bochim." They named it after their weeping. They made a display of their penitence. Their tears were so poor that they must needs advertise them. It can hardly be a matter for wonder that neither name nor tears lasted long. He fasts best who "appears not unto men to fast." He weeps best whose tears for sin have in them enough of shame to make him seek to hide them. Our Heavenly Father would no more have us cry at the corners of the streets than He would have us pray there.

III. Tears promptly followed by sacrifice. "And they sacrificed there unto the Lord." Probably they offered special sin-offerings, on account of the message of the Angel, in addition to the festive offerings in connection with this particular gathering of the congregation. 1. *Tears for sin are nothing without sacrifice.* Personal offences between man and man are to be forgiven freely, even "unto seventy times seven." Every man is commanded, without any reparation whatever, to forgive his fellows, as he hopes to be forgiven. But no ruler of a community can forgive offences thus freely. In this case, forgiveness of the one would be a wrong to all others. At the public bar the requirements of justice are simply absolute. Whatever other reasons may or may not exist with God, this alone is imperative. The law must be magnified, and made honourable. Tears can never suffice without sacrifice. 2. *Tears should lead us to the sacrifice of Christ.* In Him "*righteousness* and *peace* have kissed each other." 3. *Gratitude for tears wiped away should lead us to personal sacrifice.* He can know little of the sacrifice of the Cross who does not believe with some self-sacrifice of his own.

IV. Conviction, tears, and sacrifice, all fruitless for want of true repentance. "The curse causeless shall not come" (Prov. xxvi. 2), but the curse foretold by the Angel did come, and come speedily. There can be only one conclusion; the repentance was too unreal for the conviction to be worth anything, for the tears to be grateful to God, or for the sacrifice to be acceptable in His sight. The final punishment of those who never repent must be dreadful; but the final punishment of those who all their life long are convicted without conversion, who weep without penitence, and who come to Christ without really giving themselves to Christ, must be terrible indeed. To all the woe of the impenitent lost, their woe must have added the awful vexation of a disappointment which must seem as though hell were added to hell. It is an apostolic conclusion, that those who in this life only have hope, "are of all men most miserable." Unreal religion in this life is a factor by which, in the life to come, the Divine punishment of sin will be self-multiplied by the sinner to his own aggravation of the ordinary woe of the lost.

The Way to and from Transgression.—*Verses* 4, 5.

I. The easy way to disobedience against God. Weeds need no cultivating, but a good harvest comes of much labour. Transgression seems indigenous even to the best of human hearts. "Ill weeds grow apace;" we cannot see *why* they grow so readily, but the process *through which* they come

can be traced with tolerable distinctness. The disobedience of these Israelites may be traced through the following stages:—1. *Decreasing prayer.* Awhile back they asked, "Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites" (chap. i. 1)? When Judah failed in faith, we hear of no fresh inquiry. When the rest of the tribes were discouraged, we are told of no further supplication to God. Had the prayer of Ps. lxxx. been upon the hearts and lips of the tribes now, we had heard of no such rebuke as this at Bochim. Had Israel cried, "Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up Thy strength, and come and save us," there could have been no such record as that in the last part of chap. i. The failure of prayer is the beginning of failure "all along the line." 2. *Love of ease.* Incessant conflict was probably getting more and more disagreeable. He who prefers rest in his own way to obedient rest in the word and will of God is fast nearing the place of tears. 3. *Increased desires for gain.* The tribes "could not drive out" their enemies, yet they "put them to tribute," and thus betrayed the "would not" which underlay their "could not." Tribute and no conflict, seemed easier than conflict and no tribute. That, too, led to Bochim. They were seeking to make a profit out of God's enemies. Like Achan, they too were taking of God's devoted things, and they also were seeking to conceal them: Achan hid his spoil in his tent, and they attempted to hide theirs under the idea of lawful tribute. 4. *Growing self-assurance.* When the tribes were weak, then were they so strong that they never lost a battle; when they grew strong enough to put their enemies to tribute, then they never won another victory, till out of their distress and renewed weakness they cried again unto the Lord (chap. iii. 9, 10).

II. The difficulty of escaping from sin when once it has been committed. The way of escape is (1) *through tears;* (2) *through sacrifice;* (3) *through obedience, without which both tears and sacrifice are in vain.* The real difficulty of escaping from a life of sin is thus seen to lie in the difficulty of true repentance. God is ever "ready to forgive" when we are ready to be forgiven. Esau might have found mercy as readily as Jacob, could he have found a heart to seek and wrestle with God; the difficulty was here,—Esau "found no place of repentance, though he too came to Bochim, and "sought it carefully with tears." Pardon is ever offered to the penitent; but if they who have known God's goodness turn from it, the difficulty is "to renew them again unto repentance" (Heb. vi. 4–6). The dying penitent is ever on the borders of paradise, but the dying are often very far from penitence (Luke xxiii. 39–43).

III. The great grace of God through Jesus Christ the Saviour. 1. *God sent many warnings.* Repeated warnings of these very sins were given through Moses. Many more were given through Joshua. Victory was always afforded to them when faithful. Yet they sinned. 2. *God came with personal remonstrance.* The Angel of the Covenant Himself enters into controversy with the disobedient at Bochim. "Last of all He sent unto them His Son." Neither did this avail. The league was still maintained. The altars were still spared. 3. *God manifested gracious patience.* The evil foretold in verse 3 did not come to pass at once. The Lord waited, that He might be gracious. It is not till we read that "Israel served Baalim" that we are told "the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel" (verses 11–14). The Lord tried them, and proved them. 4. *God showed great readiness to hear their cries of distress.* At the very first signs of penitence He raised them up judges to deliver them (ver. 11; chap. iii. 9). For all that, yet did they not truly seek Him (verses 17–19). Thus, though Divine grace is so exalted, "the way of transgressors is hard;" it is hard while they pursue it, and hard for them to turn back from it into the paths of righteousness and peace.

The Tears of Earth and the Tearless Heaven.—*Verse* 5 (*a*).

It is said that there shall be "neither sorrow nor crying" among the redeemed in heaven, but that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The place where there is no more sin is to be a place where there shall be no more tears.

I. God, who will presently wipe all tears away, here causes them to flow abundantly. It is the angel of His presence who here constrains the people to weep.

II. God, who wipes tears away only where there is no more sin, here makes them to flow for sin. Did sin bring no tears, the sinful would know little enough of penitence. This Book of Judges is the Lord's own commentary on the necessity for our tears. Nowhere more than here is it seen that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom."

III. God, who waits to wipe all tears from off all faces, has no pleasure in causing them. Weeping is not an arbitrary arrangement, but is born in us of Divine pity and love. "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth."

IV. God, who while we are here moves us to tears Himself, will when we are there Himself wipe them away. As at Bochim, so often; He comes to us on earth to make us weep. In heaven, it shall be as it was at the crossing of the Jordan into the land of Canaan, about which the bards of Israel presently sang: "The waters saw Thee, O God, the waters saw Thee; they were afraid:" "What ailed thee, O Thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" So at our entrance to the Promised Land on high, the river of tears shall be driven back at the very sight of the God of love. We "shall see His face;" and from the everlasting joy of His countenance shall be born the tearless and immortal gladness of our own.

Bochim.

Our tears are of small account when, moved by penitence and love, we voluntarily come into our Lord's presence and shed them at His feet. Tears have even much sweetness in their pain then. When Peter went out *from Christ* to cry, he "went out and wept *bitterly;*" when the sinful woman came *into Christ's presence* and washed His feet with her tears, who does not feel that her tears were tears of gladness? The tears, too, of Mary Magdalene, shed at the empty tomb, presently got all the pain taken out of them when she was able to exclaim, Rabboni. He who sheds his tears at the feet of Jesus will always find that he is the happier for them. When our tears for sin fall on His feet, they turn to diamonds of the first water, and as we recall how He said, "Thy sins which be many are all forgiven thee," memory does but pick them up as jewels for our soul's future enrichment.

Pain is God's great teacher. No one can learn well without it. Take two boys of equal gifts and equal industry. Let one grow up with almost no crosses and suffering, and the other with trials many and deep, yet borne with patient fortitude. How shallow will the one life be when compared with the richness and depth of tone in the other!

Pain must always be interpreted relatively. You cannot look on a wounded child, on a strong man crippled suddenly for life, or on a young mother taken from several young children, and read the meaning *there*. These are but "parts of His ways." You can make nothing of the Cross on Calvary if you look at that alone. You may, in spirit, join those of whom it is said that "sitting down they watched Him

there," but, like them, you also will fail to understand it thus. You will have to keep them company in yet that further experience, when they "smote their breasts, and returned." But look out on Pentecost; look at the records of the apostles' labours, as given in the Acts and in the Epistles; look at the eighteen centuries during which the Crucified One has been drawing all men to Himself: read the Cross in the light of all that, and it will be beautifully different from the same Cross when you look at it merely through the terrible gloom of the three hours' darkness, or try to make out its rich and far-reaching meanings through the agonised utterances of the suffering Son of God. Even so our smaller crosses can seldom be made out amid the gloom of their own darkness. "Blessed are all they that wait patiently for Him," to make the vision of suffering and tears plain upon the tables of life.

"They wept, but we do not find that they reformed,—that they went home and destroyed all the remains of idolatry and idolaters among them. Many are melted under the Word that harden again before they are cast into a new mould." [*Matt. Henry.*]

"From Gilgal to Bochim" is a path much shorter and much easier than that from Bochim to Mount Zion. The history of the one is in a few brief pages, which record no conflict; that of the other is a history of many struggles, extending to the time of David (2 Sam. v. 6–10).

"If transgressors cannot endure the rebukes of God's Word and the convictions of their own consciences, how will they be able to stand before the tribunal of the holy heart-searching Judge?" [*Scott.*]

"The Israelites called the place Bochim; they named it from their own tears. They laid the principal stress on their own feelings, and on their own demonstrations of sorrow. But they did not speak of God's mercies, and they were not careful to bring forth fruits of repentance; they were a barren fig-tree, having only leaves. Theirs was a religion, such as is too common, of sentiment and emotions, not of faith and obedience.

"Reproofs which produce only tears—religious feelings without religious acts—emotions without effects, leave the heart worse than before. If God's rebukes are trifled with, His grace is withdrawn." [*Wordsworth.*]

"Repentance and temptation are the two purgatories that a Christian in his way to heaven must pass through. The first is of water, the other of fire. We can no sooner come out of the one, but we must look to enter into the other. No sooner have we bathed and washed our souls in the waters of repentance, but we must presently expect the fiery darts of Satan's temptations to be driving at us." [*Dyke.*]

"Like *Janus Bifrons*, the Roman god looking two ways, a true repentance not only bemoans the past but takes heed to the future. Repentance, like the lights of a ship at her bow and her stern, not only looks to the track she has made, but to the path before her. A godly sorrow moves the Christian to weep over the failure of the past, but his eyes are not so blurred with tears but that he can look watchfully into the future, and, profiting by the experience of former failures, make straight paths for his feet." [*J. G. Pilkington.*]

When men are in the wilderness of sin, even the heart of rock must be made to give forth water, lest the thirsty spirit perish outright. There are times when tears are a relief. There are places where oppressed manhood cries, "Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep." Whether God Himself speak to the rocky heart, or whether "the rod of God" be used, tears, in this desert, may well be an opening of a door to his presence.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6–10.

REWRITTEN HISTORY.

Nearly all of this paragraph is repeated from Joshua xxiv. 28–31. The language here is almost identical with that in the earlier account, but the verses are not repeated in the same order, verse 7 being placed here before the account of Joshua's death and burial. This is evidently done to throw stress on the defection of the Israelites, this being the particular subject on which the author of the Book of Judges is here dwelling. In the account in Joshua, Joshua's death and burial form the principal subject of the four verses common to both books. What is here given as verse 7, is given there as a subordinate and incidental remark. In this chapter, verse 7 takes precedence of the mention of Joshua's death and burial, because the degeneration of the Israelites since the death of Joshua has here become the main theme of discourse. This alone should be sufficient to prevent us from the mistake of the Speaker's Commentary, in which the passages from the two books are copied out and placed side by side, with the idea of showing that the verses in Judges are merely a confused and aimless repetition of the earlier record. It is true that we have here a piece of rewritten history, but the rewritten history is not therefore without an object. The object of the recapitulation is evident. As he writes of the rebuke by the angel at Bochim, the author is reminded that no such remonstrance was ever needed in the days of Joshua, nor in the days of the elders who had seen the great works which the Lord wrought by Joshua. The history under the judges would form a dark contrast to the history under Joshua. In the latter, God's mighty works have been invariably for Israel; in this history, which the author was now writing, God would often have to be shown as fighting against Israel. Under these circumstances, what could be more natural than that he should restate the record at the close of the Book of Joshua? *The more exactly he copied the identical words there, the more clearly would it serve to show his purpose here: it would show why God had turned against the people whom He had aforetime so marvellously helped.* In view of this, and of other features in the paragraph, the following points may be noticed:—

I. **The value of history.** It is God's monitor. It is in harmony with His own words. It shows us the ground for His rebukes. It explains His altered bearing towards nations and families and individuals. History, rightly read, would explain many of our reverses. History would interpret for us many of the Divine judgments. In addition to all this, history is full of incitements to a better and more spiritual life. It calls aloud to the backslider to return. It bids the prodigal son leave the swine and their coarse food and come home again to his father. It tells the penitent woman of One who is ready to forgive. It warns the Pharisee of all ages that the man of broad phylacteries and pompous prayers,—stand to the front in the Temple as he may,—is ever farther from heaven than the humble soul that cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" It says to every idolater of all times and kinds, "All the gods of the nations are idols, but Jehovah made the heavens." History is the great rock of a mighty past, from which these and many similar truths are echoed on to us in modulations incessantly varied by many differing voices, which give their peculiar tone and cadence to each particular truth they illustrate and enforce.

As to the impulse which may come to us from history, Emerson says, with his usual deep insight: "There is a relation between the hours of our life and the centuries of time. As the air I breathe is drawn from the great repositories of Nature, as the light on my book is yielded by a star a hundred millions of miles distant, as the poise of my body depends on the equilibrium of centrifu-

gal and centripetal forces, so the hours should be instructed by the ages, and the ages explained by the hours." Again: "All that is said of the wise man by stoic or oriental or modern essayist, describes to each reader his own idea, describes his unattained but attainable self. All literature writes the character of the wise man. Books, monuments, pictures, conversation, are portraits in which he finds the lineaments he is forming. The silent and the eloquent praise him, and accost him, and he is stimulated whenever he moves as by personal allusions. . . . The student is to read history actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary. Thus compelled, the muse of history will utter oracles, as never to those who do not respect themselves. I have no expectation that any man will read history aright, who thinks that what was done in a remote age by men whose names have resounded far, has any deeper sense than what he is doing to-day." If any man would know the deep doctrine which is written in history that is most exalted, he must do and be the history over again. History will be to us what we are to it.

II. The peculiar value of the history of God's more faithful servants. History, to the wise man, has both a negative pole and a positive. If our hearts are right before God, when we read of Jeroboam and Ahab and Manasseh and Judas Iscariot, history will repel us in another direction; but when we read of Moses and Joshua, Isaiah and John, the history will be drawn to us and we to it. In the measure in which our hearts are right, we shall take up the hidden power in the history, and shall make it our own. The holy yearnings and beliefs and joys of the godly dead will live again in us. Then, with their spirit taken up into our own spirit, their prayers and songs and holy deeds with our own individualism of life and opportunity, we shall reproduce also. Thus would God have us feel of each of His holier servants, "He, being dead, yet speaketh,"—speaketh in my own heart, and in my own life. Sir John Lubbock tells us that "savages have a great dread of having their portraits taken. The better the likeness, the worse they think it for the sitter; so much life could not be put into the copy except at the expense of the original." The holy dead have no such feelings of reservation. Paul said to his Corinthian brethren, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." He who makes a vivid picture of godly history in his own mind, takes so much new life to himself from those who have gone before him as the actors of that history.

III. The advantage which comes from specially reviewing such history. There are particular places in our own experience where we all have need to go back and contemplate some particular section of the past. The chemist's stores may not have medicine for all diseases; yet do the stores of history contain some warning against all our follies, some stimulant for all our weaknesses, some corrective for all our sicknesses. Just as the Word of God has some balm for each wound of sin, so have the lives of godly men some help which they can afford us in our moments of spiritual necessity. But the lives must be studied. Unread libraries benefit no one but the book-makers and the book-keepers. Idle men should read of Paul; men who fear hardships should read of Livingstone; those who lack consecration should study the life of the self-surrendered Brainerd; the stern and harsh might sit with advantage at the feet of M'Cheyne. All men, everywhere and always, should sit at the feet of Jesus, and learn of Him. He is the bread of life in all life's hunger, and the true physician in all life's sicknesses. The wealth which we might each find in the lives of godly men is priceless, but it is all stored up again in the single life of Jesus Christ. In Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The Holy Spirit shows us here how we are to rebuke ourselves in sin,

and encourage ourselves to holiness by lives like that of Joshua; the same Spirit waits to bring to our remembrance whatsoever has been said to us by the greater JOSHUA. "He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you," is the Lord's unfailing promise to every one who seeks to be a disciple indeed.

OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

I. THE INHERITANCE WHICH COMES TO A FAITHFUL LIFE.—*Verse 6.*

Joshua was faithful; he possessed Timnath-serah. The two and a half tribes were found faithful; they were sent with words of encouragement to their inheritance on the other side Jordan. Under Joshua's wise lead and good example all Israel was found faithful, and the people "went every man into his inheritance to possess the land." There is no such thing as missing the rewards of true fidelity, even in this life. There is a spiritual possession for every heart that is true to God, true to men, and true to itself; and here, the acreage and fertility of the estate are always according to faithfulness.

"If you serve an ungrateful master, serve him the more. Put God in your debt. Every stroke shall be repaid. The longer the payment is withholden the better for you; for compound interest on compound interest is the rate and usage of this exchequer." [*Emerson.*]

II. THE INFLUENCE EXERTED BY A FAITHFUL LIFE.—*Verse 7.*

The miraculous help which God gave to Joshua had a great influence. Joshua must have been led by it closer than ever to the Lord who gave him such great and repeated victories. "The great works of the Lord" influenced also the elders who had likewise seen them. But holy lives of leading men seem quite as influential as the miracles of Jehovah. The people who had not seen the miracles, served the Lord all the time they were led by the elders who had seen them. Every holy life is a miracle. The holy life of any man in a high position is as a miracle on a hill-top; the wonderful work of grace is well within the gaze of the surrounding and less-elevated multitude.

He who serves God in a lowly position can never serve Him in vain; he who occupies a high position is doubly responsible to walk worthily.

One man can lead many around him to serve the Lord, and they may be able to persuade many more.

"People seldom improve when they have no other model to copy but themselves." [*Goldsmith.*]

"Be a pattern to others, and then all will go well; for as a whole city is infected by the licentious passions and vices of great men, so it is likewise reformed by their moderation. [*Cicero.*]

"Pious Joseph, by living in the court of Pharaoh, had learned to swear by the life of Pharaoh. A high priest's hall instructed Peter how to disclaim his suffering Master. Fresh waters lose their sweetness by gliding into the salt sea. Those who sail among the rocks are in danger of splitting their ships." [*Secker.*]

"Sometimes the sun seems to hang for a half hour in the horizon only just to show how glorious it can be. The day is done; the fervour of the shining is over, and the sun hangs golden—nay redder than gold—in the west, making everything look unspeakably beautiful with the rich effulgence which it sheds on every side. So God seems to let some people, when their duty in this world is done, hang in the west, that men may look on them and see how beautiful they are. There are some hanging in the west now." [*Beecher.*] So did Joshua "hang in the west," after his more active course was accomplished, a beautiful and attractive sight to all Israel.

III. The Honour which Men Render to a Faithful Life.—*Verses* 8, 9.

"And *they* buried him in the border of his inheritance." The words read as though well-nigh all Israel might have gathered to do honour to the memory of their faithful leader.

Those who have served the Lord most worthily must, nevertheless, be gathered to their fathers. Those who live to God do not cease to live when they die. Living above, with God, their memory is still cherished by their fellow-men below. In this twofold life Joshua still survives.

Many good men are hardly known till they have passed away. Most nations and families know their worthy dead far better than they knew them when living. Half the monuments of our public squares would never have been accorded but for the light which death shed forth upon the lives which they commemorate. He who is not known yet, if he is worthy to be known, will be known presently.

IV. The Rebuke which is Given by a Faithful Life.—*Verse* 10.

"One generation goes and another comes, but the Word of God abides for ever. It holds good for fathers and children; it judges ancestors and descendants. The new Israel had not beheld the deeds of Joshua and Caleb; but the God in whose spirit they were accomplished still lived." [*Cassel.*]

In some parts of England it is still common to walk in procession round the boundaries of the parish. By this means, the elder inhabitants acquaint the younger with the landmarks of their native place. It is needful that Christian fathers and mothers should often instruct their children in those moral and spiritual limits beyond which they dare not go. But for prayerful and watchful care in this there will arise another generation after them which know not the Lord.

Note.—Further homiletical outlines on these verses will be found in the Preacher's Commentary on the corresponding passage in chap. xxiv. 28–31, of the Book of Joshua.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11–16.

Man's Sin and God's Anger.

We see in these verses, sin notwithstanding much goodness, anger on account of grievous sin, and mercy because of great distress.

I. **The sin of the Lord's people.** Their transgression was of a twofold nature. 1. *They forsook God.* (*a*) *They forsook Him, notwithstanding His holy character.* The lofty manifestations of His holy name made no abiding impression on them. The pure truths which He had given them had no place in their hearts. They preferred the lewd service of idols to the knowledge of the holy God. The reason of unbelief and forsaking God now, is often because God's Word is too pure and too holy in its requirements. No man forsakes God because God is below his ideal of goodness. (*b*) *They forsook God in spite of His Divine right to their service.* They were not their own, but bought with a price. God was their Maker. He had "brought them out of the land of Egypt." He had fed their fathers forty years long in the wilderness, and often saved them when they were ready to perish. (*c*) *They forsook God, forgetting His boundless goodness to themselves.* The mercy in which the Lord had dealt with their fathers He had shown to them no less. He had helped them in all their necessity. (*d*) *They forsook God on the very ground which He had given to them for an inheritance.* Every city which they held was Jehovah's gift. They set up their idols on the land which He had won for them with a high hand

and an outstretched arm. He who sins in these days, always sins with strength and amid opportunities which the Lord has given. This is ever one of the heinous features of all transgression. God gives men health, riches, intellectual gifts, a comely person, many social advantages; and when men sin they invariably use God's favours as a means of offence against God. (*e*) *They forsook God, heedless of many warnings.* Jehovah had repeatedly warned them in plain and unmistakable terms, through both Moses and Joshua, of these very transgressions of which they were now guilty. He had warned them of the danger of disobedience by the defeat at Ai. More recently the angel of His own presence had warned them at Bochim. They had themselves affirmed to Joshua, in a solemn covenant at Shechem, that they would reject all the strange gods of the Canaanites. They had said, "The Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey." They had heard Joshua say, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve Him;" and, accepting that solemn challenge, they had answered back, "We are witnesses." God ever has room to say to those who transgress, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee." All sin is "without excuse." 2. *They served the Baalim and Ashtaroth of the Canaanites.* (Different forms of Baal-worship have already been mentioned in the Critical Notes on this verse.) "The worship of Baal amongst the Jews seems to have been appointed with much pomp and ceremonial. Temples were erected to him (1 Kings xvi. 32, 2 Kings xi. 18); his images were set up (2 Kings x. 26) his altars were very numerous (Jer. xi. 13), were erected particularly on lofty eminences (1 Kings xviii. 20), and on the roofs of houses (Jer. xxxii. 29); there were priests in great numbers (1 Kings xviii. 19), and of various classes (2 Kings x. 19); the worshippers appear to have been arrayed in appropriate robes (2 Kings x. 22); the worship was performed by burning incense (Jer. vii. 9) and offering burnt sacrifices, which occasionally consisted of human victims (Jer. xix. 5); the officiating priests danced with frantic shouts around the altar, and cut themselves with knives to excite the attention and compassion of the god (1 Kings xviii. 26–28). Throughout all the Phœnician colonies we continually find traces of the worship of this god; nor need we hesitate to regard the Babylonian Bel (Isa. xlvi. 1), or Belus, as essentially identical with Baal, though perhaps under some modified form." [Smith's *Bib. Dict.*] In the same manner, there can be little doubt that the Assyrian goddess Ishtar is, for the most part, the same as the Phœnician Ashtaroth. In the "Assyrian Discoveries" of the late Mr. George Smith, many of the inscriptions refer to the goddess Ishtar and to the honours demanded and rendered in her worship. It need hardly be said that the distinguishing feature between the worship of Jehovah, whom the Israelites forsook, and of Baal and Ashtaroth, for whom they went astray, was emphatically this;—one was pure and self-denying, the other was lewd and self-indulgent. They who change their gods, generally do so because their affections are set on things of the earth, and not on things which are above; because sensuousness and indulgence of the passions are more pleasant than the self-denying ordinances of the God of heaven.

II. **The severity of the Lord's anger.** "The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel." 1. *It was terrible in its reality.* Some people lay so much stress upon the mercy of God, that they get to treat His anger as a mere sentiment, having little expression except in words. God's anger is the anger of truth, and righteousness, and love. It is no less severe because it is calm and full of patient waiting. The angel does not smite at Bochim, but the smiting is none the less terrible when it comes.

> "When anger rushes unrestrained to action,
> Like a hot steed, it stumbles in its way.
> The man of thought strikes deepest, and strikes safely." [*Savage.*]

God bears long with His disobedient children, but woe comes heavily on those who mistake His patience for indifference. 2. *God's anger was fearful in its consequences.* "He delivered them into the hands of the spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, that so they could not any longer stand before their enemies." These consequences became matters of history. The Book of Judges is one early fragment of that history. When men would forget the anger of the Lord in the more pleasing thought of His mercy, they should remember that Divine anger has an awful history. No vapid sentiments can do away with the history of the deluge, with the overthrow of Sodom, with the plagues of the wilderness, with this suffering under the judges, or with the subsequent captivity at Babylon. Men may refine upon future punishment as they will; past punishment will always stand ready to revise their theorisings in the human judgment, and an ineffaceable sense of the deserts of sin stands equally ready to correct them in the human conscience. Any calm and tender preacher of the wrath of the Lamb is good against all the books that were ever written to make light of it; history and conscience make short work of what may be called the poetry of the appetites. 3. *God's anger is not vindictive.* There ever seems to be in it far more thought for truth and for His creatures than for Himself. The wise man can do little but fear an anger which rests on a basis so broad as this, and which moves to punishment with slow gentleness through so many remonstrances. 4. *The anger of God is necessary.* Unlike ours, His anger is Mercy's last plea with the obstinate. It is necessary for the vindication of His own laws; it thus becomes necessary for justice; it is necessary for those who have not been so fully tempted to transgress; it is, at least in this life, necessary for the transgressor himself. Fancy the effect, in a single year, if the thought of the reality of God's anger were blotted out from the universal conscience of living men to-morrow!

III. **The tenderness of the Lord's pity.** "Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them." Man's distress is, in itself, a plea before God. It was "when they were greatly distressed" that the Lord was thus moved to compassion. Our suffering becomes a prayer to God, even when no word of prayer is uttered. It was so with the Israelites in Egypt. When "the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, their cry came up unto God *by reason of the bondage.* And God *heard their groaning*, and God remembered His covenant" (Exod. ii. 23, 24). "Mercy hath but its name from misery," said Thomas Binney, "and is no other thing than to lay another's misery to heart." It is the severe Apostle James who tells us that "the Lord is very pitiful." The severity of truth and the tenderness of love ever dwell together. The anger of the Lord makes His mercy very beautiful; the mercy of the Lord makes His anger very terrible.

OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

The All-Seeing Eye of God.—*Verse* 11.

I. **He who "does evil," always does it "in the sight of Jehovah."** There is no other place in which to do it. "Thou art acquainted with all my ways."

II. **He who forsakes the Lord, is still and ever in the presence of the Lord.** He "compasses the path and lying down" of the idolater also.

III. **He who serves, other gods," ever bows down to them under the eye of the only God.** All the idolatries of men are carried on at the foot of the throne of their insulted Lord.

Mrs. E. B. Browning tells us that though all her gentlest-hearted friends could concentre their gentleness in one

heart, that still grew gentler, till its pulse was less for life than pity, she must hesitate to reveal her own heart even to such a friend. She says—

"I should fear
Some plait between the brows, some rougher chime
In the free voice;"

and then, thinking of those who stand continually under the glance of Omniscience, she exclaims in wonder and envy concerning the holy angels,

"Who bear calmly all the time
This everlasting face-to-face with God."

We all have to bear this everlasting face-to-face with God every day; many bear it heedlessly, because His face is not yet visible. They walk before Him neither by sight nor faith, but they are "in the sight of the Lord," nevertheless. Human blindness blots out of existence nothing that is. Every tree is a tree, whether seen or not; every rose is beautiful, though every passer-by has lost his eyes. So man is not out of "the sight of the Lord," because the Lord is out of the sight of man.

Forsaking God.—*Verse* 12.

I. When men forsake God they seek false gods. Few men propose to do without a god. It is only "the fool" who hath "said in his heart, There is no God." Man must have a god. Men may forsake the living God in heart and thought, and still cleave to Him in their creed. Even then, they both forsake God, and serve false gods. The essence of idolatry is in having a new god, not in serving the new god openly.

II. When men forsake God it is usually through misguided love. It is "*with the heart*," also, that man believeth *unto wickedness*. Changed affections ever have to do with a change of gods.

III. When men forsake God they do so in misdirected efforts. They still "serve;" and serving idols, they serve where the yoke is no longer easy, and the burden no longer light. Israel forsook God, but "*served* Baalim," and "*followed* other gods and *bowed* themselves unto them." He who forsakes the fountain of living waters, always finds a heavier task in hewing out "broken cisterns that can hold no water."

IV. When men attempt to forsake the Lord, they attempt what is impossible. They may follow other gods, but God, from whom they would depart, still follows them. 1. *If men could forsake God, they would be godless indeed.* With exquisite sarcasm Jeremiah says of the gods of the idolaters: "They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not; they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them, for they cannot do evil; neither also is it in them to do good." 2. *But no man can forsake God.* The children of Israel tried to, for many generations, but presently returned even from Babylon to build again the Temple of Jehovah. God will not forsake us. He will be for us, as He was for Israel under Joshua; or He will be against us, as He was often against Israel under the judges (ver. 15). "He must reign." There is no Tarshish to which we can flee that is beyond His presence. There is no sea on which we can sail that He does not rule its waves. There is no shipmaster with whom we can take passage whom He cannot constrain to cry to us, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God." The Lord has His messengers of reproof beside every idol altar before which it is possible for man to bow down.

CHANGING GODS.—*Verses* 12, 13.

I. Gods changed, heedless of the claims of the only true God. Jehovah had done great things for them, but they were not glad in Him.

II. Gods changed out of regard to indulgences which might be afforded. Children sometimes think a foolish nurse kinder than wise parents. That is because they are children.

III. Gods changed, and prosperity changing also. He who had been for them in many a field, was turned to be their enemy, and fought against them (ver. 15.) That could only end in their being "greatly distressed."

IV. Gods changed, and heaven finding therein an occasion for astonishment. "Hath a nation changed their gods which are yet no gods? but My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be ye very desolate, saith the Lord" (Jer. ii. 11, 12).

I. Motives for changing gods. These all lay in the direction of sense, and of time.

II. Determination in changing gods. Neither Moses nor Joshua, and not even the angel at Bochim, sufficed to hinder these men, whose hearts were set in them to do evil.

III. Results from changing gods. 1. *The results which were external and general.* "They were greatly distressed" in their surroundings. 2. *The results which were internal and personal.* Every man must have been troubled in his own conscience.

IV. God's way of asserting that He alone is God. 1. *He chastised them severely.* 2. *He chastised them by the very people with whom they had made leagues.* 3. *He chastised them by the corruptions which came of their newly-chosen worship.*

THE LORD GOD OF OUR FATHERS.—*Verse* 12.

The expressions, "My father's God," "the God of his fathers," "God of our fathers," "God of my fathers," &c., are used many times in the Scriptures. The thought is common to both the Old and New Testament utterances. Dr. Parker, under the title, "The Pathos of Theology," has a suggestive outline on the phrase, as occurring in Exod. xv. 2. An abstract from this is here given. "My father's God":—

"**I. Then religion was no new thing to them.** . . Religion should not be an originality to us; it should not be a novel sensation; it should be the common breath of our daily life, and the mention of the name of God in the relation of our experiences ought to excite no mere amazement.

"**II. Then their father's religion was not concealed from them.** They knew that their father had a God. . . Is it possible that your child is unaware that you have a God? Is it possible that your servants may be ignorant of the existence of your religion?

"**III. Yet it does not follow that the father and the child must have the same God.** Religion is not hereditary. You have power deliberately to sever the connection between yourself and the God of your fathers. It is a terrible power.

"**IV. Then we are debtors to the religious past.** There are some results of goodness we inherit independently of our own will. This age inherits the civilisation of the past. The child is the better for his father's temperance. Mephibosheth received honours for Jonathan's sake. The processes of God are not always consummated in the age with which they begin. Generations may pass away, and then

the full blessing may come. We are told that some light which may be reaching the earth to-day, started from its source a thousand years ago. What is true in astronomy is also true in moral processes and events; to-day we are inheriting the results of martyrdoms, sacrifices, testimonies, and pledges which stretch far back into the grey past of human history.

"The text impels us to ask a few practical questions:—

"1. *Are you so much wiser than your father that you can afford to set aside his example?* 2. *Will you undertake to break the line of a holy succession?* 3. *Will you inherit all that your father has given you in name, in reputation, in social position, and throw away all the religious elements which made him what he was?* You would not willingly forego one handful of his material possessions. Are you willing to thrust out his Saviour? 4. *Your father could not live without God,—can you?* Your father encountered death in the name of the Living One. How do you propose to encounter the same dread antagonist? When your father was dying, he said that God was the strength of his heart, and would be his portion for ever. He declared that but for the presence of his Saviour he would greatly fear the last cold river which rolled between him and eternity, but that in the presence of Christ that chilling stream had no terror for him. When the battle approached the decisive hour, your father said, 'Thanks be unto God which giveth to us the victory,'—how do *you* propose to wind up the story of your pilgrimage?" [*Dr. Parker.*]

Idolatry.

"Idolatry! you cannot find any more gross, any more cruel, on the broad earth, than within the area of a mile around this pulpit (in New York). Dark minds, from which God is obscured; deluded souls, whose fetish is the dice-box or the bottle; apathetic spirits, steeped in sensual abomination, unmoved by a moral ripple, soaking in the swamp of animal vitality. False gods, more hideous, more awful than Moloch or Baal; worshipped with shrieks, worshipped with curses, with the hearth-stone for the bloody altar, and the drunken husband for the immolating priest, and women and children for the victims." [*Chapin.*]

"A singular phenomenon, known as the Spectre of the Brocken, is seen on a certain mountain in Germany. The traveller who at dawn stands on the topmost ridge, beholds a colossal shadowy spectre moving on the summits of the distant hills. But, in fact, it is only his own shadow projected upon the morning mists by the rising sun, and it imitates, of course, every movement of its creator. So heathen nations have mistaken their own image for Deity. Their gods display human frailties and passions, and scanty virtues, projected and magnified upon the heavens, just as the small figures on the slide of a magic lantern are projected magnified and illuminated upon a white sheet." [*E. B.*]

Effects of the Lord's Anger.—*Verses* 14, 15.

"After the judgment of the word comes the judgment of the sword.

"He who ceases to remember the works of God, ceases also to enjoy the power of God. For him who shuts his eyes, the sun affords no light.

"Men are judged by the truth which they despise, and betrayed by the sin which they love. Israel can no longer withstand the nations over whom it formerly triumphed, because it courts their idols and leaves its own God." [*Cassel.*]

"He who engages in another wor-

ship, forsakes the true God, and apostatises from Him. But woe to the man who does this, for he brings himself into endless trouble.

"God is as true to His threats as to His promises." [*Starke.*]

"The judgment affords a deep glance into God's government of the world, showing how He makes all sin subservient to His own power, by punishing it with the very evils that arise from it." [*Gerlach.*]

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 16–23.

THE CONFLICT OF GOD'S MERCY WITH MAN'S SIN.

The Book of Judges, of which these verses give a summary, is a "book of the wars of the Lord." We see here God contending with sin in the hearts of His people. He who reads the Books of Joshua and Judges merely as accounts of battles between the Israelites and their enemies, will overlook by far the larger half of the conflicts set down in the narratives. As was observed in treating of the siege of Jericho, God's great battle there was with sin and unbelief in the hearts of the Israelites. Such, too, was the strife at Ai, at Beth-horon, and in the subsequent conflicts. Such, even more manifestly, is the great underlying purpose of all the struggles between man and man recorded in the history before us. In every battle, whether won by Israel or lost, the God of love is seen contending with the unbelief and idolatry of the people whom He had redeemed from the bondage of Egypt. The Divine word, through Hosea, might stand, indeed, for the text of this whole book: "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them."

I. **Great sin followed by still more abundant mercy.** "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." 1. *God's mercy was in excess of His promises.* The "thorns in their sides" had been repeatedly foretold to these Israelites. The punishments that would follow unfaithfulness had been reiterated again and again. These great deliverances under the judges had not been so foretold. While God's judgments are ever equal to His threatenings, His mercies are often largely in excess of His promises. The evils which would follow disobedience were foretold in much detail, and they came, even "as the Lord had said" (ver. 15); little, if anything, was said about the deliverances, but they came no less than the judgments. The wicked have every reason to believe that the threatened woes of the last day will also be even "as the Lord hath said;" the truly penitent will find in the way to heaven, and still more when there, that the half has not been told them of God's wondrous goodness. 2. *The mercy was through one man, because of the unfitness of the multitude.* Each judge was made the great instrument of deliverance. This was emphatically the case in the instances of Ehud and Shamgar, Gideon and Samson. It seemed as if the Lord purposely took away all opportunites from the people to glory in their own might. They were too wicked for success, and even in their deepest penitence fit only for mercy. Hence God gave them deliverance through the personal prowess of a few men. The multitude was not fit to win favours; it was hardly prepared to receive them. The measure of a Church's spiritual success is probably often according to its ability to bear success. The manner in which success comes may also furnish some indication as to our preparedness, in the sight of God, to receive the blessings of prosperity.

II. **Rejected mercy followed by reckless sin** (vers. 17, 19). The Lord raised up judges, and delivered the people out of their great distress; the people prayed for deliverance, and gladly accepted it when it came; then, when their distress was removed, they rejected the Lord who had showed mercy upon them, and thus rejected all the high meanings with which the mercy was laden.

It is not to be wondered at that we read, after that, "They returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their evil doings, nor from their stubborn way." To ignore great kindness and mercy is one of the most sure and terrible ways of hardening the heart in wickedness. Take the case of Judas. How tenderly our Lord's kindness must have pleaded with that man in the upper room! Think of the Saviour washing the feet of the man who was already committed to the sale of his Master! After the washing of the feet, Christ let Judas see that He fully knew the dark purposes of his wicked heart, and yet had washed his feet, notwithstanding. Think of the kind sad tones of the voice that said, "One of you shall betray Me!" Think of the inquiry of the twelve, "Is it I?" and of the miserable creature who, not to betray himself by being unlike the rest, was forced in his turn to ask that question also! Think of the words to John, and of the gift of the sop which followed them! Why did not Judas drop the sop, and burst into tears, and openly acknowledge what His Lord, and through Him the eleven, so evidently knew? How hard the heart of Judas must have been after he had taken that sop, and managed to swallow it without crying! The tears must have all petrified within the man—a heart full of tears, turned into the severe hardness of diamonds, but having none of their purity. The tenderness of Christ's deeds and words was not only making evident Christ's former saying—"One of you is a devil;" for Judas to reject such love was to diabolise himself more than ever. Think of the opportunity for spontaneous confession which the Lord gave to the man in the words, uttered probably with infinite tenderness: "What thou doest, do quickly!" Why did not Judas answer back: "Lord, I cannot do it at all; much less can I do it quickly, against love like Thine?" But the man had no spontaneity in him. Poor Peter would have broken down half a dozen times through that supper; but Judas had no good impulses. So, "he then having received the sop went immediately out." And he went out fully prepared to do his dreadful work. After being able to resist all the tenderness of the Saviour at the supper, it was easy work to go for the band of men and officers, and comparatively easy even to betray Christ with his kiss. The act of spurning the Lord's tender mercy had turned his poor heart to very stone. Take the case of a young man, rejecting a good mother's love and tears. Suppose a wicked son bent on doing some wicked deed. Think of a Christian and ever-gentle mother pleading with him on her knees, her eyes streaming with tears, not to do the evil thing in his heart. Imagine such a son striking that mother a brutal blow to the earth, and then fleeing from her presence while she was yet insensible. Who does not see how so wicked an act, *against such love*, would harden the heart almost beyond redemption. The man would be capable of anything after that. So it ever is with any who resist, and overcome, and put away from them tender pleadings of the love of Christ in their own consciences. So it was with these Israelites when they resisted the pleading of God's great mercy with them in their distress, and turned again to sin. Isaiah saw the glory of Jehovah as He sat upon the throne high and lifted up, and the prophet cried, "I am a man of unclean lips!" To others of the Jews, God had showed the glory of much mercy and gentleness and love. But the Jews resisted that mercy. Therefore Isaiah said of Jehovah in His splendour of goodness, "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, *when he saw His glory*, and spake of Him." The resisted light of God ever turns to darkness. The heart that turns from His glory, must needs rush very deeply into sin, to forget itself. The glory makes a man feel with Peter: "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man;" it makes him who sees it cry with Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips;" or it drives him who

beholds it more recklessly into wickedness than ever. Thus was it with the Israelites. When they turned again to sin after God's very marvellous and gracious deliverances, there was nothing for it but that they should give themselves up to idolatry without restraint. To sin against great light and tender love, is to sin with utter recklessness.

III. Reckless sin followed by still severer chastisements (vers. 20, 21). "The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel." He said, "I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died." On one occasion, we see how, for a time, the Lord absolutely refused to hear their prayer. He answered them in their distress: "Wherefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation" (chap. x. 9–14). 1. *God's punishment of sin is too just to be given up without repentance.* It is not grounded on the anger of impulse, but on the calm anger which has its foundation in a sense of wrong—wrong to Himself, wrong to men generally, and wrong to the souls of the evildoers. Man's anger is a fire, burning with impulsive and selfish passion; God's anger is a *consuming* fire, unless it be met by repentance, for it is kindled by eternal principles of righteousness and benevolence 2. *God punishes sin too deliberately to forego His chastisements without reason.* He does not begin to build His towers without counting the cost. The steady and increasing pressure upon Pharaoh can only end in Pharaoh's destruction unless he repents. Israel itself must presently be carried even to Babylon, if Israel will persist in idolatry. 3. *God's punishments are too full of love to be given up lightly.* Not only is the anger calm, but the love is very deep. The anger of God against sin has no hatred of the guilty—

> "He hates the sin with all His heart,
> And yet the sinner loves."

"Having loved His own which are in the world, He loves them unto the end." Hence we are prepared to see, as indicated in these closing verses,

IV. Chastisement, in its severest form, still made the vehicle of God's merciful purposes (vers. 22, 23). God would "prove Israel" to see whether or not they would keep His way. The spirit of this patient purpose runs all through the book. It was not a sudden purpose, formed only when the Israelites began to depart from God. God had cherished that purpose even in the time of Joshua, and forborne to deliver the Canaanites entirely into Joshua's hand. Notwithstanding this dark history under the several judges, the Divine purpose did not fall to the ground. Through steady and stern chastisements, the Israelites gradually grew into the feeling that the way of sin was a way of sorrow. God made Bye Path Meadow rougher than the King's highway. There were times when Giant Despair fastened the people in his terrible stronghold. They were often glad to return again by the way in which they had departed. The result was that during Samuel's time the nation was found, probably, nearer God than at any period between the death of "the elders who outlived Joshua," and that of Samson in the house of Dagon, at Gaza. Mr. L. H. Wiseman has well expressed the real progress of the nation in the following remarks: "I am inclined to think that the period of the judges was, upon the whole, a period of national advancement. The prevailing idea is, no doubt, opposed to this view. It contemplates the period of the judges as an unbroken series of idolatries and crimes and miseries, relieved only by the occasional appearance of a Barak or a Gideon, like a momentary gleam of sunshine on a dark tempestuous day. But a deeper study of the times tends to modify and correct this idea. The rule of the judges secured long periods of tranquillity. Of history in general, it may be justly said that it brings into bold relief a

nation's wars and discontents, while epochs of peace and prosperity are either thrown into the background, or left unnoticed. The exceptions, rather than the rule, are recorded; just as a voyager, narrating the story of his crossing the ocean, dwells chiefly on a storm or two which befell him, and passes lightly over many a week of smooth and pleasant sailing. . . . It is thus with the Book of Judges. The period of which it treats was not a period of incessant warfare; but it was marked by long and frequent intervals of repose. War and disgrace were, after all, the exception; peace and tranquillity were the rule. Thus, after the victory achieved by the first judge, Othniel, 'the land had rest forty years;' after Ehud's victory, 'the land had rest fourscore years;' a little later, 'the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon;' the twenty-three years of Tola, the twenty-two years of Jair, the twenty-five years following the death of Jephtha, all passed without any recorded national struggle; and the forty years of Eli's official life were free from war till its melancholy close. And although the people's lapses into idolatry were frequent, they were so far checked and restrained, that of 450 years, according to the computation of a learned writer (Graves on the Pentateuch), there were not less than 377 years during which the worship of God was generally maintained. Gloomy and fearful as are some of the details furnished in the Book of Judges, the Hebrew nation was nevertheless in a better state during that period, morally, politically, and spiritually, than it became afterwards during the reigns of the later kings. For these long intervals of tranquillity and of rest from the enemy—during which many a family, no doubt, followed the Lord in quietness and faith, according to that lovely picture of domestic piety given us in the Book of Ruth—the Church of those days was indebted, under God, to the judges, who, through faith, 'wrought righteousness, and obtained promises.' . . . On the whole, during this period, the Hebrew nation increased in importance and strength. After Joshua's death there had been a rapid decline; but if we take as the commencement of the period the state of things in the time of Othniel, the first judge, and compare it with the state of things in the time of Samuel, who was the last, the advancement is too manifest to be disputed. The Jewish state went on from that time increasing in glory till it reached its culminating point a century later in the reign of Solomon: after which commenced its long and unretrieved decline. In the period of the judges, notwithstanding the defections from God, the rebellions, the outrages, the confusion, the bloody civil strifes which the historian records, so that at the close of the book we seem to behold, as a learned writer (Bishop Wordsworth) observes, 'An overclouded sunset, almost a dark eclipse, of the glory of Israel,' yet idolatry was neither so frequent, so open, so obstinately continued, nor so shamelessly immoral, as it became in the later period of the monarchy. The rulers of the people, instead of being hereditary tyrants, and sensualists who taught their people to sin, were special messengers of God, men of faith and power, capable of checking public disorder, and of restoring religion and faith. Notwithstanding frightful interruptions, like the deep rents and yawning chasms which meet the traveller ascending their own Lebanon, the general tendency and direction of the period of the judges was not downward, but upward toward the heights beyond." So far as progression under the judges is concerned, little exception can be taken to this careful and eloquent estimate, which well accords with the view taken by Dr. Kitto. As to the subsequent decay under the later kings, perhaps the verdict is somewhat too emphatic. Notwithstanding the guilt of Jeroboam, Ahab, Manasseh, and other monarchs, and the dire results of their apostasy among the people, it should not be forgotten that even in Ahab's days there were seven thousand who had not "bowed the knee to Baal," and probably many more who bowed reluctantly. There seems even some ground for Dean Stanley's remark lying wholly in another direction: "The

age of the psalmists and prophets was an immense advance upon the age of the judges." Of the progress of the people from Othniel to Samuel, however, there can be little doubt. God's chastisements were not in vain. The purpose of the Lord was full of mercy, and the mercy did not fail. In the language of one of the last of the judges, "Out of the eater came forth meat." The Lord's chastisements are no less full of merciful purpose in these latter days.

OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

A Nation's Great and Good Men.—*Verse* 16.

I. The relation of a nation's great men to God. 1. *The Lord raises them up.* They are of His providing. After all allowances for evolution and natural development, He is at the back of both. 2. *The Lord chooses the time for raising them up.* He raises them up when they are wanted. Carlyle says: "Show our critics a great man, a Luther for example, they begin to what they call 'account' for him; not to worship him, but to take the dimensions of him, and bring him out to be a little kind of man. He was the 'creature of the time,' they say; the time called him forth, the time did everything, he nothing—but what we the little critic could have done too! This seems to me but melancholy work. The time call forth! Alas, we have known the times *call* loudly enough for their great man; but not find him when they called! He was not there; Providence had not sent him; the time, *calling* its loudest, had to go down to confusion and wreck because he would not come when called." All this is true enough. Still, when Providence does not answer the call of a critical time, it is because there is something in the men of the time which forbids this answer. When the man for the time does not come, it is not because God is short of men, but because the men of the time have got where "confusion and wreck" are better for that time, or after times, than any amount of prosperity.

II. The relation of great and good men to a nation's social and religious condition. 1. *True leaders are not always given because of a nation's merit, but often in spite of its unworthiness.* The great sin of Israel made these judges necessary, yet the judges were not given till distress had wrought penitence. When the people were penitent, then God sent them a helper. Periods of national calamity on account of sin, like those which we find in this book, account for the spirit of much of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple; still more is their influence to be marked in the profound sense of national humiliation pervading the prayer of holy Daniel (Dan. ix. 3–20). 2. *Such leaders are not raised up by God after the thought and manner of men.* They may be lefthanded, like Ehud. They may be women, like Deborah. They may be of such a class as Gideon, who cried, "O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." The Lord never needs to prop up His greatness with any of the so-called greatness of men. Shamgar, the man of the ox goad, or Jephtha, "the son of a strange woman;" either can do the Lord's work so long as the Lord is with them. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth." 3. *Some leaders are raised up, even from their birth, to give deliverance to their nation.* They are the subjects of God's forethought, and training, and careful provision. Such was Samuel. He whom the Lord would raise to conspicuous greatness and usefulness is generally nurtured amid the influences of pure religion. We do not hear much of the mothers of the judges, in general; nor was the influence of the ordinary judges very abiding (ver. 19): Samuel whose influence was to last through all the nation's history was the child of a mother who both knew

how to pray, and how to give her much-loved child to her more-loved God. A nation's real leaders must needs be scarce when there are no real mothers.

III. The relation of men whom God raises up to a nation's deliverances. 1. *All victory is of the Lord; leaders are but the instruments through whom He works.* (*a*) *None of the deliverances are wrought to any considerable extent by the people.* In this Book, it is *the man* by whom God works, *not the multitude.* (*b*) *No leader is too weak so long as God strengthens him.* Ehud, the left-handed man triumphs when God is with him; yet even mighty Samson fails when the Lord has "departed from him." Shamgar's ox goad, or the jaw bone of an ass, or the ardour of the woman Deborah; nothing is too rude, no one is too weak and unskilled, if the Lord does but bless the instrument. (*c*) *All these features of victory were meant to teach Israel that "the battle is the Lord's."* "Without Me ye can do nothing;" that is one side of the Book of Judges: "I can do all things through Him which strengtheneth me"; that is the other side. 2. *The Lord works most enduringly with those leaders who walk most with the Lord.* Set the work of the sensual and mighty Samson over against that of the pure and unselfish Gideon, whose humility led him to claim the lowest place in the poor house of his father, and see whose life brings most of blessing to his nation. Even the rude strength of Jephtha—a man of ready resources, quick movements, and a born commander, but tainted with the spirit of the surrounding idolatry—compares feebly indeed with the enduring mercy that comes to Israel though the calm gentle strength of holy Samuel. Israel's great song in this Book is the outcome of the ardent piety of a woman, and the best perpetuated mercies of the nation spring from the labours of Gideon and Samuel who walk very near to God. Even here, Gideon's influence becomes sorely weakened by the Ephod, which became a snare to his nation, his household, and himself (Chap. viii. 27). Great leaders are a great gift of God, but when greatness and true piety go together, the Lord's favour is rich indeed.

The Influences of Good Lives.—*Verse* 16.

"What an umpire Nature is; what a greatness, composure of depth and tolerance there is in her. You take wheat to cast into the earth's bosom: your wheat may be mixed with chaff, chopped straw, barn-sweepings, dust and all imaginable rubbish; no matter: you cast it into the kind just earth; she grows the wheat,—the whole rubbish she silently absorbs, shrouds *it* in, says nothing of the rubbish. The yellow wheat is growing there; the good earth is silent about all the rest,—has silently turned all the rest to some benefit too, and makes no complaint about it." [*Carlyle.*]

This is so, and not so in the sowings that come of our human lives. The good seed of a good life grows. God suffers not that to lack a harvest. But the bad seed of our lives grows also. Our moral and spiritual rubbish is full of life-germs, and the soil around us is still more favourable to get a heavy crop out of them. "*Whatsoever* a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" alas! others around him will reap a good deal of it also.

A good life is light from heaven; it is a revelation of God; it is God's image, wherein man was originally made, set up before surrounding lives. The holier of these judges not only showed the people what a human life should be; every approach to holiness which they made in their work was in that measure a revelation of the Divine character to their fellows. Every true worker now, in proportion as his work is true indeed, reveals his

Father which is in heaven before the eyes of his fellows. In this sense, there is much beauty in the lines of Goethe, as translated by Carlyle :—

"In Being's floods, in Action's storm,
I walk and work, above, beneath,
Work and weave in endless motion
Birth and Death,
An infinite ocean;
A seizing and giving
The fire of living:

'Tis thus at the roaring loom of time I ply,
And weave for God the garment thou seest
Him by."

God's Unappreciated Mercies.—*Verses* 17-19.

I. Man's insusceptibility to mercy (ver. 17) :—1. *Through blindness to what was good in man.* "They would not hearken unto their judges." 2. *Through love of what was evil in things.* Their gods represented so much self-indulgence in wickedness. 3. *Through ingratitude for all that was gracious in God.* They did not care to remember His great goodness. La Rochefoucauld said, "We seldom find people ungrateful as long as we are in a condition to render them services." Yet these Israelites show us how possible it is to take the Lord's services and, at the same time, to ignore Him.

II. God's persistence in mercy (ver. 18). 1. *In raising up judges.* It must have needed much encouragement for the judges to have come out from the multitude: God gave them sufficient encouragement to do even that. 2. *In being present with the judges.* Some of them were very faulty, but for all that the Lord would not forsake them for His people's sake. 3. *In giving the people actual deliverance from oppression.* He who had put them into the hand of their enemies, when affliction had done its work, also took them out again. 4. *Because of His great pity.* "It repented the Lord because of their groanings."

III. Man's rejection of mercy. Even after they had again and again "tasted and handled and felt" the grace of God, sometimes bestowed in answer to their own earnest prayers, they turned again to evil. Well might they be spoken of as men of a "stubborn way." Yet unto us also God's mercies are "new every morning." Are we more grateful than these, whose faults we can so easily perceive?

Israel's Apostasy.

"Apostacy is followed by ruin; the loss of character by that of courage. Heroes become cowards; conquerors take to flight. Shame and scorn came upon the name of Israel. The nation could no longer protect its cities, nor individuals their homes.

"In distress the people returned to the altars which in presumptuous pride they had left. *Old* Israel wept when it heard the preaching of repentance; *new* Israel weeps only when it feels the sword of the enemy.

"1. Israel must contend with sin, and with enemies. 2. Israel experiences the discipline of judgment and of compassion. 3. That which approves itself is the victory of repentance and the obedience of faith.

"A recent philosopher (Fischer) defines philosophy to be, not so much universal science as *self-knowledge*. If this be correct, repentance is the true philosophy; for in repentance man learns to know himself in all the various conditions of apostacy and ruin, reflection and return, pride and penitence, heart-quickening and longing after Divine compassion." [*Cassel.*]

"God's judgment on Israel is the non-destruction of the heathen." [*Lisco.*]

"From the fact that the whole history does at the same time, through scattered hints, point to the flourish-

ing period of Israel under the Kings, we learn that these constantly-recurring events do not constitute a fruitless circle, ever returning whence it started, but that through them all God's providence conducted His people by a road, wonderfully involved, to a glorious goal." [*Gerlach.*]

The Love that Lingers in Divine Anger.—*Verses* 20–23.

I. The anger of the Lord is not without due cause (ver. 20). The covenant with the fathers was transgressed. The voice of the Lord was not hearkened to by the people themselves. God's words to the fathers is binding on the children. God's messengers, and mercies, and judgments, are His "voice" to the men to whom they are sent.

II. The Lord's anger is not without painful results. The nations which had been left, under Joshua, to prove the people, were to be left still. This is but a sentence, as it stands written here, but it presently expands into a history of woe. No word of God's warning must be neglected, otherwise it may resolve itself into terrible suffering, it may spread to a whole nation, and require a volume for the history of its consequences.

III. The Lord's anger is not without loving designs. This is true, so far as it applies to His anger in time. He would still "prove Israel," and still watch to see if they should "keep the way of the Lord." Love waited to be gracious wherever gracious manifestations would work no harm. He who led His people forth by a right way that He might bring them to a city of habitation, no less determined to keep them in a right way. In the end, our salvation must all be seen to be of Divine goodness.

CHAPTER III.

GOD'S MEANS OF TESTING CHARACTER AND CHASTISING FOR SIN.—Verses 1–4.

Critical Notes.—**1. Which the Lord left.**] Allowed to remain, *i.e., spared from doom;* not—*did not mark out for destruction.* For *all* the Canaanites were doomed to be exterminated, including the Philistines, the Phœnicians and Sidonians; also the Hivites, as far north as the Gate of Hamath, which was about one hundred miles farther north than the conquests of Joshua reached (Num. xxxiv. 7-9; Gen. xv. 18). God Himself was to do the work; His people were to be the instruments employed (Deut. vii. 2, 23, 24; xi. 23, 24; xx. 16, 17). But His engagement to aid them was conditioned on their obedience and trust. When they failed in fidelity to Him, their conquests were arrested, and the tide began to flow the other way (Josh. xxiii. 12, 13). When from unbelief or indolence they held back from attacking the Canaanites, God spared those whom they spared. Hence, what is called "breach of promise"—apparent, not real (Num. xiv. 34). **To prove Israel by them.**] לְנַסּוֹת (*Greek* ἐκπειράσαι). Some regard this phrase as having a different meaning here from what it has in verse 4, and in chap. ii. 22, where it is used of moral probation, or testing faith and obedience. Here, they say it means to *exercise*, or *train for war*—to give them practice in fighting with the view of keeping up the warlike spirit among them. [*Pulp. Com. and others.*] This alteration in the interpretation of the word, in one and the same paragraph, is purely arbitrary, and could scarcely have been thought of but for the necessities of a certain theory, as we shall see under ver. 2. Here, it means to *test character*, as in Deut. xiii. 3; and the point to be tested is stated in ver. 4 to be, whether they had the spirit of true allegiance to their Covenant God. As many of Israel as] those who came to man's estate after the close of the wars of Canaan (chap. ii. 10). The survivors of the wars of Canaan did not need this discipline. **Had not known all the wars of Canaan**] *i.e.*, by personal eyesight and experience. They had not passed through them, seen with their own eyes the formidable dangers, and met them boldly, through strong faith in the promise of their God.

2. Only that the generations, etc.] Here we have a statement of the moral purpose served by the wars. It was to prove what the younger generations would do when they had personal experience of those wars. Would they show the same fidelity and courage as the fathers, or not? The construction of this verse is peculiar, arising partly from a difference in the idiom of the languages. *Bertheau* makes Jehovah the subject of the verb *to know*, and makes *Israel* the object—the sense being "that He (Jehovah) might know Israel (by putting them to the proof) in teaching them war (giving them the opportunity of fighting against these nations in dependence on His promise)." This gives a good sense, though it seems more natural to regard "the generations of Israel" as the proper subject of the verb. We prefer to render it thus: "Only for the purpose (רַק לְמַעַן) *that the generations of the children of Israel might have the knowledge* (דַּעַת) *of war, through a personal experience of it* (לְלַמְּדָם) (not all the generations of Israel, but) *those only* (רַק) *who before had not known it.*" The important question here is, what is meant by "teaching them war." Many understand it to mean, *knowledge of the art of war*—to cultivate in them a martial spirit, skill in handling their weapons, and true valour in the field. This, it is said, would be a check on effeminacy, and keep them up to the mark of being always able to defend their country when peril should arise. *Trapp* has it, that Israel might not rust through long rest . . . "them slay not lest my folk forget." "Scipio," he says, "persuaded the Romans not to ruin Carthage lest their youth should want exercise, and grow wanton with too much ease." If this be the correct view, it is singular that they should be required to fight with their enemies, in order to be able to fight with their enemies. But passing this, it is significant, that none of the many critics who adopt this meaning quote any parallel passages in its justification. There are no such passages. The whole teaching of Scripture is to the opposite effect, *viz.*, that the people of the covenant must rely, in all conflicts with their enemies, solely on the promised help of their God. (Ps. xx. 7-9; xliv. 3, 5-8; Hos. xiv. 1-3; Ps. cxlvii. 10, 11.) The use of natural means had its place, but the people are never taught to rely at any time on that prop, for the defence of their country. On the contrary, the manner in which they acquired possession of the land, is ever represented as the rule according to which they might hope securely to occupy it, namely, by faithfully obeying the commandments of their God. To learn war after the manner of the "wars of Canaan" we understand to be, to look for victory, not through personal bravery, but through the omnipotent help of Jehovah, given in fulfilment of His promise, in answer to faith and prayer.

3. Five lords of the Philistines. Three of these lordships had been formerly subdued by Judah (chap. i. 18), but seem afterwards to have been lost through the sloth and unbelief of that tribe in failing to follow up their advantage. Where sin is not extirpated, it will, like a noxious weed, take root again—"lords," or satrapies (Sept.). The original *sarnaim*, or "princes" literally signifies *axles*. The chief is so called because the people and public affairs alike revolved around him as the parts of a wheel upon its axis. [*Bush.*] Josh. xiii. 3; Jud. xvi. 5, 8; 1 Sam. vi. 4, 12, 16, etc., xxix. 2, 6—(סַרְנֵי) lordships, or principalities. **And all the Canaanites.]** This list is not quite the same with that given in Josh. xiii. 3, etc. Changes had occurred; conquests had been won and defeats suffered. But the difference lies chiefly in the fact, that the paragraph in Joshua gives an account of the allotment to the different tribes of the land occupied by the nations, that are here said to be spared to serve as scourges for Israel's sins. The phrase "*all* the Canaanites" does not refer to all the nations called by that name who originally occupied the country, for very many of these had been slain; but partly, it refers to those that were still found within the territory conquered by the tribes (both the uplands and valleys having towns that were either wholly or partially filled with Canaanites), and chiefly to that large and formidable nation of the Canaanites outside the conquered territory to the north-west, whom the Israelites had not yet met in arms—the Phœnicians. This people, who are generally identified with the Sidonians, occupied a narrow strip of land of only two miles in breadth, but extending along the coast for a distance almost equal to the entire length of Palestine from Dan to Beersheba. In this strip were the cities of Tyre and Sidon; it was densely populated, and the people were among the most intelligent, enterprising, and powerful nations of ancient times. It began near the point where the territory occupied by the tribes terminated, and extended northward, shut in between the Lebanon range and the sea. It was all within the original limits of the land of promise, and ought to have been occupied by the Israelites, as part of their inheritance, though it never was really subdued by them. Sidon was the firstborn of Canaan, and his descendants were the very worst among races where all were so bad. Take Jezebel for an example (1 Kings xvi. 31; xxi. 25). The Canaanites who dwelt among the Israelites were most numerous in the northern tribes, and it was these especially that were "snares and traps to them, scourges in their sides, and thorns in their eyes." The Philistines.] The plain of Philistia, with a breadth of about twenty miles, ran along the entire seaboard of the Mediterranean from the desert, in a line parallel with Judah, to a point near the middle of Palestine. In the central section of the coast, the plain becomes narrower, being only two miles in breadth, and is shut in by the mountains of Manasseh and Ephraim. This is called the plain of Sharon. And the Hivites that dwelt in Mount Lebanon.] The derivation of "Hivites" is interesting. First comes חָוָה to live, and חָוָה including the idea of *roundness*. ὠὸν ovum

an *egg* (Sept.), which is both round and the source of life. Hence חַוָּה and חֲוָה came to signify *encampment* (2 Sam. xxiii. 11), and *village* (Num. xxxii. 41), from the circular form in which camps and villages were disposed. The people called "the Hivites" are those who reside in *round villages*. Even down to the present day, the villages are so built that the conically-shaped houses form a circular street, enclosing an open space in the centre for the flocks and the herds. This habit of building distinguished the Hivites from the other nations. [*Cassel.*] Baalhermon,] from חֶרְמוֹן *height*, or highlands. Hermon is the loftiest peak in the Anti-Libanus range. It is the southern spur, and towers far above all its surroundings. This district and all northward among the hills and valleys of the Lebanon range, for a distance of nearly 100 miles beyond the point of Joshua's conquests, was occupied by the Hivites (Josh xi. 17; xii. 7). Baal-gad is the same with Baal-hermon. All this district was originally marked out for inheritance by the tribes, but in fact was never subdued by them. The entering in of Hamath. The narrow pass which opens out on Hamath—the most northern point in the land of promise [*Eadie.*] This is the gate to Canaan on the north.

Note on the "Wars of Canaan."—These did not belong to the common category of human wars. They were specially made at God's command for a high moral purpose—to vindicate Jehovah's character in the punishment of flagrant transgressors. In doing this, solemn displays of the Divine Perfections were made, both before the heathen nations and before the chosen people. They were therefore sacred wars, and on sacred principles were they fought. As compared with other wars, the differentiating element in them was, that God Himself was the chief actor, who always determined the issue, and the principle on which He gave success or permitted defeat, was the possession, or the want of trust in His name, and fidelity in keeping His commandments. These wars were indeed both a test of spiritual obedience and also a discipline to correct and refine. To know them implied a great deal more than to know the art of fighting bravely as warriors. Brave as Joshua and his followers were, there was no proportion between their small resources and weak arms on the one side, and the chariots of iron, with the hosts numerous as the sand on the sea shore, which these nations mustered, on the other. It was a war of children against giants—of sheep against wolves. Never were armies more unequally matched, and never was faith of victory through God's promised help more thoroughly tried. The fathers knew that the conquest of Canaan was not a thing of easy achievement. And now the children must be trained on the same lines, that they may learn how hard a thing it is, as a condition of their retaining possession of the inheritance, to be firm and loyal to their God in the actual presence of enemies, so superior in all the equipments of war, to themselves.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.

The genius of the history of Israel, as distinct from every other history, lies in the fact, that they were the people of the Messiah. They were His *brethren*, being, together with Him, Abraham's seed and members of one family circle. They were His *ancestry*, for "of them Christ came who is God over all." etc. They were His *people*, and represented Him on earth till the times of His personal appearance. Being the people of the Messiah, the Messiah's God becomes their God. God unites them to Himself in the bonds of an everlasting covenant, engaging with great condescension to make Himself over to them as their God, and adopting them to Himself to become His people. In them and in their history, we see a practical embodiment of the blessings which the Messiah procures for men. In them we see an illustration of what God, for the Messiah's sake, can do in following sinful men through all their course of disobedience and rebellion, and not only preserve them from utter ruin, but lift them up at last, through faith and repentance, to the full enjoyment of everlasting life.

This is the picture which is set before us in this, and in all the historical books of the Old Testament. *The Covenant* is the backbone of all the Divine dealings with this people, as set forth in these books. We see there, in the position which God takes up, and from which he never withdraws—*I will be your God*—the vast resources of love which may be drawn upon, in support of all the demands made on the patient forbearance and forgiving tender mercy of God, by the terrible depravity and highhanded rebellion of a perverse people. We see why it is they are not "consumed in a moment"—why not utterly cast off at any

time, not even under the Babylonish captivity—why they are so often forgiven, and such astonishing proofs of the Divine favour are shown on their behalf. From the beginning, Jehovah became *their God*. That position once taken, their history throughout becomes the medium for a glorious display of all the Divine perfections, in pardoning and blessing men for the Messiah's sake.

Hence we uniformly find them greatly beloved of God. We see God in close contact with them every moment of their existence; they are never out of His sight, and no hand is allowed to touch them but His own. They are to Him a "peculiar treasure," and He keeps them in the hollow of His hand (Deut. xxxiii. 3; Psa. cxxi). He takes the entire direction of their history, and all its issues are to him. This we shall now endeavour to trace.

Tests and Chastisement.—*Verses* 1-4.

I. The work to be done.—*The trial and chastisement of an unfaithful people.*

1. Chastisement as well as trial. The people had already shown symptoms of apostasy, and there was more than reason to suspect their fidelity. The plague-spot had appeared, and there was need to cauterise. When symptoms of "fretting leprosy" show themselves, an examination must be made. The mere presence of such neighbours as these Canaanites, and the having to dwell among them, was itself a chastisement. The presence of bears and wolves in the family circle, even if they should be muzzled, would be a great affliction to the children, though the object might only be to ascertain whether they would put their trust under the parental wing. But it would be chastisement in terrible earnest, were the muzzle removed. So with Israel, when these wicked were first allowed to dwell among them, and when, afterwards, the reins were let loose, and they were permitted to exercise their savage passions at will.

2. A special mark is put on the reason for this course of dealing. God had already explained with great distinctness the ground of His procedure (chap. ii. 20–23). Yet He now repeats it, to put emphasis on the necessity of such a course of dealing with a people who had been the recipients of unbounded mercy, and yet were beginning to show the extreme of ingratitude. "He speaks once, yea, twice." He calls aloud that men may mark His jealousy for His own honour as a Holy God, while yet so full of compassion for His adopted people. Thus at the outset of this checkered history, He explains—"line upon line"—the ground of his procedure, that it may stand clear to every eye. On this trial and chastisement these things are to be noted:—

I. It was God's own thought to put them to the proof. "*The Lord* left these nations." He kept the guidance of their history in His own hand. He directed it this way, not that way. He put the machinery in motion. It did not fall out in the ordinary course of events. Neither did the nations themselves entertain any such thought.

1. Far otherwise were the thoughts of the nations. "*Israel was a speckled bird among the nations—the birds round about were against her.*" There was *a something about that people* which excited the hostility of the other nations. It was the old "enmity between the woman's seed and the serpent's seed." This hatred was not due merely to the successful war which Israel had waged against their cities and armies, though that had its share of the reason. But it was due mainly to the character of Israel's God and His ways. He was too holy and righteous in Himself—too severe in His condemnation of men's sins—for a world lying in wickedness to do other than hate His image wherever seen. Their thoughts were—

(*a*) *when Israel was strong, to seek alliance with them*—only for their own

advantage; to gain the profits of commerce, or obtain security against future possible exterminating wars. When true religion is in power, the world will be obsequious, and multiply honeyed words; but when the opportunity is given, it will stab to the heart, and not pity. So—

(*b*) *when Israel became weak, their thoughts were of conquest and revenge.* They gnashed their teeth when they thought how terribly these upstarts among the nations had decimated their armies, destroyed their cities, and robbed them of their soil. Feelings of retaliation, or of self-interest, were their only motives. Depraved human nature, without the grace of God, cannot rise higher. The last thing they would have thought of would have been to serve any purpose of the God of Israel in the matter. But "there be higher than they." While they thought they were serving only purposes of their own, He was overruling all that they did to accomplish His own holy and benignant ends.

2. The nations could do nothing without God's permission. God "sets a hedge round about" His people that none may touch them till permission is granted. Even Satan admits this (Job i. 10). The lapidary allows no one to cut or grind his jewels but himself, or if another comes in, it is by express appointment, and the work is done under his own direct supervision. Jehovah would not allow these nations to look Israel in the face, to tempt, chastise, or intermeddle with them, until they were needed as instruments to execute some gracious purpose of His own. *Had he not judged it necessary to sift Israel's character*, and put it to the proof, we should not have read a line of the raids of Chushan-rishathaim, or of Eglon, and other marauders, whose tragic deeds constitute so large a part of the story of this book. These rough hammers would never have been employed on God's precious stones, had he not seen good reason for it, and permitted it to happen. But as soon as the hammer has done its work, it is flung aside, and not another stroke is allowed. The nations did nothing till God gave them a charge; and when Israel became penitent, He applied the bridle to their wrath. "Their wrath He made to praise Him, and the remainder He restrained."

3. This proving of character was done out of respect to His covenant. It was His own doing, and it was done according to a fixed rule of dealing.

(*a*) *God acted by principle, and not by temporary impulse.* He never acts otherwise. He is never in haste, and never under the influence of excitement as man is. Were it so, He would be weak like man. But He acts by fixed covenant arrangement. Covenant implies system—a definitely arranged course for all time to come. It is beneath the majesty of the King Eternal to act by temporary impulse, or to make any real change in His rules to meet what mortals regard as peculiar contingencies. He comprehends from the first all that may happen, and provides against every emergency.

(*b*) *He acted according to His established manner of dealing with His people's sins.* It was foreseen that sin—its existence, its inveteracy, its continual breaking out among the people, notwithstanding all the precautions taken to prevent its prevalence—would constitute, to human wisdom, a perplexing, hopeless difficulty in the way of carrying out the provisions of the covenant. God's character, as a "consuming fire" against the workers of iniquity, was not changed by His entering into covenant with this people. On the other hand, "His people were bent to backsliding from Him," and there was an extreme necessity for vindicating the Divine character, in order to the righteous bestowment of covenant blessings.

(*c*) *Provision made for this through the intervention of the coming Messiah,* the real Mediator of the covenant. Of His appearance and work in "the fulness of time," intimation was daily given by fresh victims evermore laid upon the altar, throughout their entire history as a people. Meanwhile some course must be taken to carry home to the hearts of the people a conviction of

the flagrant character of their sin, in presuming to break their solemn pledge to the Most High, and to prefer the unhallowed service of heathen gods to the pure worship of Israel's God. Afflictions serve this purpose. God will not break His promise, for it is an "everlasting covenant." Neither can He look upon sin. But He will chastise. He will cast into the furnace to "purely purge away their dross, and take away all their tin." So He leads them back to Himself, in the exercise of unwearying forbearance, "for His mercy endureth for ever." (Ps. lxxxix. 31–34.)

4. God puts His people under discipline to serve wise and holy ends. If enemies are used, they are but the rod in His hand, employed to do a necessary work. They do nothing merely at their own discretion. Any commission given to an earthly power is limited by the charge, "Thus far, but no farther."

(*a*) *No real injury is ever intended.* They are more sacred to Him than any other property. He watches over them as the mother bird fluttering over her young; and, as that mother placeth her own body between her young and the arrow that is aimed at their heart, so he who would smite a child of the covenant must first fight with Him that made it.

(*b*) *Never is the rod without some gracious instruction.* "Hear ye the rod, and Him who appointeth it." "*All his works are done in truth and uprightness.*" (Ps. xxv. 10.) This gives confidence to the pious heart, and stills all apprehension as to the issue. How many "Fear nots" are in Scripture. Instances in David's history. Before Shimei he "accepts the punishment of his iniquity." "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him!" God put him to the test, and he stood it. (See also Ps. xxxix. 9; 2 Sam. xxiv. 14.

5. God Himself determines the time, manner, and severity of the trial.

(*a*) *The time*—not *too soon*—lest He should seem to be suspicious of His people, and take pleasure in hastening to chastise. His language rather is, "Surely they are My people, children that will not lie" (Isa. lxiii. 8.) Nor *too long*—lest the malady should get too deeply-rooted, and require a far more severe operation to eradicate it at a future period. In the one case, the tendency would be to foster a spirit of bondage; in the other, to make light of sin, and presumptuously to cast off the fear of God.

(*b*) *The manner*—in such form as to instruct the mind in the evil nature of the sin which has brought down the chastisement. The bitter streams of which God causes them to drink, spring from the very sins on account of which God chastises them. "*Thine own wickedness correcteth thee, and thy backslidings reprove thee.*"

(*c*) *The severity*—not destructive, as if He found pleasure in taking vengeance. "*To crush under His feet the prisoners of the earth . . . . the Lord approveth not*" (Lam. iii. 34, 36). "*I will not contend for ever*," etc. (Isa. lvii. 16). A ruthless enemy may be employed as the instrument, yet he cannot go a step beyond the limit prescribed, nor durst he inflict a single pang to gratify malice or revenge, except in so far as that may be a means of carrying out the purpose of the real actor. "*I am jealous for Jerusalem with a great jealousy; I am very sore displeased with the heathen, for I was but a little displeased* (with my people), *and they helped forward the affliction*" (Zech. i. 14, 15). Sometimes His hand is very heavy. He goes the length of "barking our fig tree," and "laying our vine waste" (Joel i. 7). That which is proverbially fruitful He makes conspicuously desolate. But He has always "a bottle for the tears," and a balm for the wounds. He may use the "scourge," but never the "sword." He "afflicts not willingly." He "chastens for our profit."

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

THE LORD'S THOUGHTS ABOUT HIS PEOPLE.—*Verses* 1–4.

I. God has many thoughts about His people. "Many are thy thoughts to us-ward; they cannot be reckoned up in order." He concerns Himself much with them and their history. "*I know the thoughts that I think toward you—thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*" They are the children He has nourished and brought up. They are called by His sacred name. He has once taken them by the hand, and His love is unchangeable. He has removed mountains for them, and dried up seas—rolled back rivers in their course, and made the hard rocks gush forth streams of water, and the heavens send down angels' food. How should He not have many and loving thoughts about His people!

II. God's thoughts about His people are often anxious thoughts. He has chosen them to show forth His praise; but how can a disobedient and rebellious people serve a purpose like this? He appoints them to illustrate the righteousness of His law, and the tenderness of His dealings; but how can they do this when they are daily sinning before Him, and there is no end of their murmurings? He has engaged to see them all safely through the dangers of the wilderness, and settled in the enjoyment of the spiritual inheritance above; but how can this be accomplished when there is so much unbelief and hardness of heart shown at every step of the Divine leadings? "*O, Judah, what shall I do unto thee? How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land and goodly heritage?*" "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel—a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We will come no more unto thee?"

III. Behind all His thoughts are gracious intentions. They all spring from love at bottom. Not one is dictated by enmity, or even indifference. They are all only different forms of loving-kindness and tender mercy, corresponding with the different or changing circumstances in which they are placed. "*How precious are Thy thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!*" Sitting on the throne of the Gospel, God's thoughts to His people are only of pardon, reconciliation, peace, and the hope of eternal life. The Father's will is that nothing of "the bundle of life" be lost, but "raised up again at the last day." And even now His several chastisements are sent to serve the ends of love.

IV. God's thoughts of what true love is are very different from ours. "*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts.*" He can forgive without difficulty to any extent, where there is true penitence, and trust in the blood. "He abundantly pardons." But He often withholds that for which flesh and blood ardently crave. He applies crucial tests to bring out the whole heart, and covers us with shame and humiliation. In place of allowing us to sit down at ease, and enjoy the good things of this life without stint or annoyance, He makes us go through the briers and thorns, and learn to "scorn delights and live laborious days." "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." The permanent rooting out of sin from the heart, though requiring sharp present suffering, is regarded as true love in the end in the estimation of our God.

THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD.

"God not only appoints all our chastisements, but they are under His special *direction* and *management* as to their nature, degree, continuance and effects. What a comforting reflection this! To have every circumstance of our distress in the management of such a hand! He is most intimately ac-

quainted with our frame and feelings. He is possessed of unerring wisdom and infinite goodness, so that our affairs cannot miscarry in His hand. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His permission. So minute and tender is His care over us, that He 'makes all our bed in our sickness.'" [*McLean.*]

"The raising of our troubles, the keeping them upon us, and the removing of them, is all of the Lord. It is His wise disposal, and not an ill chance (Amos iii. 2). Do not, therefore, rest in second causes, nor vex yourselves as if spurning against the Lord, but patiently bear them. Whoever may be the instrument, the Lord is the overruling cause.

"When by God's kindness and many comforts we cannot be brought to cleave to Him with all our hearts, He will take another course to bring us thereto. He will acquaint us with wants, trouble, and sorrow. And yet such is His love, that if they prevail with us, and work kindly upon us, to bring us to repent, He will return to us again graciously and continue His former bounty. Our first parents when they sinned began to know what good and evil meant. Children, while tenderly dealt with by their parents, have all things with ease provided for them; but when they grow up and are put to shifts, they come to know what hardness means, through the rough handling of strangers." [*Rogers.*]

"Chastenings from the Lord often act as a touchstone of human character. They are an Ithuriel's spear to reveal every man as he is. When Pliable and Christian came to the Slough of Despond, they both fell in and wallowed for a time in the mire. Pliable was instantly unmasked. He angrily asked his companion, Is this the happiness you have been telling me of all this while? After a desperate struggle he got out of the mire on that side which lay next his own house, and Christian saw him no more. But Christian got out on the side next the wicket gate.

But sharp tests while they sift, also strengthen religious characters. When the wind shakes a young tree, and bends it to the earth, it seems to be retarding its growth, yet it is really furthering it. It makes it strike its roots deeper into the soil, that its stem may rise higher and stronger, till it can struggle with tempests and spread its green leaves to a thousand summers. The winds and storms are the educators of the tree, no less than the sunbeams and the dew. In the intellectual world a strong mind thrives on difficulties. There is no falser method of education than to make all smooth and easy, and remove every stone before the foot touches it. God has ordained that where there is to be progression there must be struggle. Specially is this the case where the alloy of sin has entered, and needs to be smelted out by the hot furnace." [*Ker*].

"The country of the Israelites was rich, and abounded in dainties of all sorts, so that they were in danger of sinking into the utmost degree of luxury and effeminacy. They must, therefore, sometimes wade in blood, and not always in milk and honey." [*Henry.*]

God's Change of Dealing.

Here we have the first step taken in a new course of the Divine dealings. The change is very marked—similar to that of the attitude of the Lord God towards our first parents in the garden of Eden, when man had sinned. At first his voice was heard in loving intercourse with man at the cool of the day; but soon came the frown, and "He drove out the man." All the days of Joshua were as a bright morning in the history of the young nation whom the Lord had brought out of Egypt. "*He couched, he lay down as a lion; he did eat up the nations his enemies; he brake their bones, and pierced them through*

with his arrows." Prosperity flowed "as the waves of the sea." These were the "lights" of Israel's history; but alas! the "shadows" followed. In the first chapter of Judges, the atmosphere becomes electrical; in the second, specks begin to appear on the horizon, and the first mutterings of the approaching thunder are heard. Now in this chapter, we see the dark clouds getting settled in the sky, and the elements of destruction being prepared. What could have happened that that same God, who had given up these Canaanites to Israel to be trodden down as the mire, should now permit them to rise up and become Israel's masters, and even sweep over the land as an over-running flood? The change is too marked to escape notice:—

1. It is rendered necessary by sin. Israel had an "*evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.*" This apostacy in the heart was now showing itself in the life. "God who seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is much displeased with the sin of having any other god."

2. There is no real change in the Divine Love. An altered conduct on the part of the people leads to an altered tone on the part of their God. When the child forsakes the father, that does not imply that the father forsakes the child. God did not depart from His purpose, but other means now became necessary to carry it out. If God now speaks in notes of thunder in place of whispers, it is still Love that speaks.

3. A change in the Divine attitude is required from the danger of leaving sin unchecked. When the stone has begun to roll down the hill, it must be stopped at once, if stopped at all, for soon, otherwise, it will become unmanageable. As soon as the heart shows that it has decided to have another god, true love will hasten to take measures to show the folly and ruin in which such a course must end.

4. Apathy in the worship of God led to this change. We note a strange silence in this book on the subject of the observance of Divine ordinances. We hear nothing of the solemn feasts, of the services of the priesthood, and the performance of duties in the sanctuary. The altars and their sacrifices, the sprinklings, washings, and ceremonial requirements of the law, are as if they were not. The few glimpses given of the religious life of the people, show how mournfully they fail in forming the most elementary conceptions of the meaning of the Divine ordinances. *Micah* had a superstitious parody of the Mosaic rites. *The Danites* followed his example. *Gideon* worshipped a visible god. *Jephthah* had but a slight knowledge of the law of vows. While *Samson* and his parents had but a very crude knowledge of the Mosaic institutions.

This is instructive. The mind must be filled. If it does not accept the true God, that which is no god, or the things of this world, must occupy His place. If it is not led by the Spirit of God, it must be under the dominion of "ungodliness and worldly lusts." To "walk in the Spirit" is the appointed means of gaining the victory. (Gal. v. 16.) To neglect to do so leaves the door open, and the danger is imminent.

The very mention of these nations looks like the wolves prowling round the sheepfold. It is the appearance of a dark cloud, ominous of stormy times. It is the first visible frown on the countenance of Him, who bore His people through so many dangers for two generations as on eagles' wings. There was a change in God's attitude, but not in God's purpose.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 1–4.

II. It was necessary to put Israel to the proof.

1. Their allegiance to their God must be ascertained. This was indispensable.

(1.) God's jealousy required it. In this character He reveals Himself in the covenant. "*I the Lord thy God am a jealous God—thou shalt have no other gods*

before me." The smoke and the thunders of Sinai were a visible confirmation of that character of jealousy. Both the attitude of the Speaker, and what He said, showed that He was intently watchful of the measure of respect that was paid to His character, by those whom He addressed.

(2). **Without allegiance the people were not in a fit state to receive Divine blessings.** Every promise was conditioned on this. It was no secondary question. The good of the creature cannot be advanced by sacrificing the glory of the Creator. It would have been derogatory to God's holy name, to have lavished His favours on a rebellious people. Those whom He shall bless must have a fitness of character to receive the blessing. If they are to be a mark toward which His love is to go out, He will see to it that they be worthy of His love. He loves *all* men with a *love of compassion*, but He regards those only with a *love of complacency*, who bear His image and keep His commandments. "*He taketh pleasure in them that fear Him.*"

(3.) **Ways and means were easy where there was allegiance.** A consistently religious character on the part of the people being given, all difficulty was at an end for bestowing any needed blessings upon them. As regards deliverance from dangers, however great, it was easy for God to "drive asunder the nations," to make "one man chase a thousand," or to make a mighty host melt away in absolute weakness, before a mere handful of men. Nay, even iron chariots, solid walls of masonry, and armies of giants, were as the small dust of the balance before Omnipotence. These things were small in God's estimation; what was great was—trust in His character, and obedience to His voice. This trust was uniformly required ere He put forth an atom of his power. The refrain of every chapter seems to be, "*O that my people had hearkened—I would soon have subdued*" (Ps. lxxxi. 13, 14). Men's sins block the way to the outgoings of God's loving kindness (Isa. lix. 1, 2). Even the power of working miracles was a greatly smaller possession, than a good title for admission to the heavenly world. A similar principle in Matt. xii. 50. Where Jesus found faith, He had no difficulty in working cures. In one short hour He could with ease heal the whole sick list, in any of the towns through which He passed. But when there was no faith He paused. "*He could there do no mighty works because of their unbelief.*"

2. **Human protestations of obedience are little to be trusted.** "He that trusteth to his own heart is a fool." Every page of human life confirms the sentiment—the history of this people pre-eminently. Take two illustrations—

(a) When they first received the law from their God. Awe-struck with the majesty of Him whose terrible voice was echoed by the thunders and the earthquake, and which made even Moses exceedingly fear and quake, never did people pledge themselves more solemnly to keep His law with all care, in all the duties of life (Ex. xxiv. 7). Yet, behind the scene, what is the verdict of the Searcher of hearts? "*O that there were such an heart in them!*" etc. (Deut. v. 29). Within six weeks, this same people were gathered on the same spot to demand of Aaron, "*Up, make us gods to go before us, for as for this Moses . . . we wot not what is become of him*" (Ex. xxxii. 1).

(b) When they were newly settled in their promised home. The human heart was here tried under totally altered circumstances. Formerly, there was indeed the great deliverance from bondage as an accomplished fact before them, but as yet there was nothing possessed. All was wilderness around them. They were in complete destitution, and had nothing to look to but promise, while that seemed to be of impossible accomplishment. Now the thing promised has been accomplished in all its length and breadth. The people are assembled in their thousands to receive the farewell counsel of the venerable captain, who had led them to an unbroken series of victories over mighty armies all over the land, with scarcely the loss of a man.

Their hearts within them swelling with gratitude for "the great goodness of their God to the house of Israel," they are called upon to say, in sight of the thrilling history they had passed through, would they, in all candour and sincerity, resolve from this time and henceforth to fear Jehovah and serve Him as their God, or would they prefer to join with the Amorites around them in the worship of their gods? Instantly and vehemently, they protest against the possibility of their forsaking Jehovah and worshipping other gods (Josh. xxiv. 16). They are warned against a loose decision in so important a matter, and solemnly asked to make it on a broad and well-considered basis. They feel hurt that their sincerity should be doubted for a moment—"Nay! but we *will* serve the Lord." The decision was unanimous, unhesitating, firm. Alas! for human protestations! At that very moment there were already strange gods among them, though the welkin rang with the cry of undying allegiance to Jehovah, and not a single dissentient voice was raised throughout the vast multitude, that were assembled on that solemn day. Now the "root of bitterness" has begun to bear fruit.

Causes of Failure in Fidelity to the Covenant.

(1.) **Their avowal was made in self-confidence.** They did not rely on the promised grace of God, as alone able to make them stand. They trusted to the present warm emotions of their own breasts, when their feelings were raised to flood-mark at the retrospect of their marvellous history, and they supposed they would always feel as they felt then. But good resolutions are not indigenous to the human heart. They do not grow all the year round, nor all the week through. They are not like the stone pillars on which the rough blasts beat in vain, and stand unshaken in all weathers. Rather, they are like the gourd which comes up in a night, and perishes in a night. Our safety lies not in the warmth of present feeling, but in offering up the prayer, "*Teach me the way of Thy commandments, and I shall keep it unto the end. Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies.*" (Ps. xvii. 5.) Peter was sincere, though not wise, in what he said, as the result showed. (Matt. xxvi. 33, 35, and 72, 74.) His real security lay in the fact, that he was in the hands of a mighty Advocate, who had beforehand prayed for him that his faith should not fail. Good moods, even high moods, may be occasionally reached, but they afford no security for to-morrow. "If God withdraw His grace and leave us to ourselves, we are like a city without gates and walls—a prey to the first enemy that appears, however contemptible."

(2.) **It was made in self-ignorance.** Every man is disposed to "*think more highly of himself than he ought to think.*" This is the besetting sin of our fallen nature. Trying themselves by man's standard, many think themselves to be something before God when they are absolutely nothing, and so deceive their own hearts. The people that stood before Joshua thought, that the strength of their convictions was so great, they could stand any amount of temptation to turn them aside from their allegiance. The spectacle of all that God had done for them in the wilderness, and in the land of their inheritance, was now fresh before them, and they reckoned that it would always be thus vivid. But it is little that any man knows of "the plague of his own heart." There is more latent wickedness in the hearts of even the best of men than is ever suspected to exist. It is only when the seemingly clear pool is stirred to the bottom, that a discovery is made of the large sediment of evil that is deposited in it. The heart is not a fountain whose goodness is in itself, and that has power to purify itself, but it is a spring-head naturally impure, that has to import from without all its cleansing influence. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

(3.) **It was made in ignorance of the evil influences around them.** Satan is ever desiring to have the Jobs, the Davids, and the Peters, to sift them as wheat. The wolf does not more thirst for the blood of the lamb, than does the Wicked One show himself ravenous for the ruin of souls. "He goeth about as a roaring lion," etc. Woe to those that are off their watch, and are unprepared for the spring of the terrible enemy! He ever prowls around the fold of the Good Shepherd, hoping yet one day to be able to seize something out of His hands. Yet there is the precious assurance; "*I give unto my sheep eternal life—and they shall never perish.*" The world too, both by its smiles and by its frowns, proves a formidable enemy. It has long been an enchanted ground to Zion's pilgrims. Yet through faith we "overcome the world."

(4.) **It was made without counting the cost.** God's service ever has a cross of some kind, and every man who enters it must have some idea of the weight of that cross. If this is not done beforehand, he will soon come to "take offence at that cross," for he will find that what he supposed to be a mere pleasure-walk, has turned out to be a steep, rugged, and dangerous course. The rule is—"*Crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts*"—"*cut off a right hand*" when that is required—"*hate father and mother*" rather than lose Christ. We must appreciate the strength of Christ's claims upon us, and know beforehand the lions we shall have to fight with, if we are to enter His service, and so calculate whether we shall accept it with all its risks, or whether reckoning the cost to be too great, we shall go over and join the standard on the other side.

3. Their responsibility was now greatly increased. God had done great things for them, and the rule now applied—"*To whom much is given, of them much shall be required.*" For upwards of eighty years they had had a remarkable history of privilege. No nation since the beginning of Time had seen such a sublime series of Divine interpositions on their behalf. It was a unique history, and now the climax was reached. They were in actual possession of the land flowing with milk and honey. God was now saying, "*What more could I have done for my vineyard?*" The time of a great expectation was come. The fruit of so much nurturing and caretaking, for two generations or more, was at last to be reaped. Settled in the land after so much cost, and with Jehovah himself as their God, it was a reasonable expectation that they should be a pattern of loyalty and allegiance to all the other nations—an oasis in the otherwise wide desert of heathenism—a solitary garden bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, while all around rose up nothing save briers and thorns. No people were more sacredly bound by obligations, and if their devotedness were at all to correspond with the measure of their privilege, it must amount to a "cleaving to the Lord with full purpose of heart."

4. Their temptations to indolence were increased. Flesh and blood love to be at ease. The "wars of Canaan" were practically over. They were "sitting comfortably under their vine and their fig-tree." They had long been wanderers; now had reached home at last, and such a home!—The glory of all lands!—"A land of brooks," etc. (Deut. viii. 7–9). Their heads laid on the lap of ease, sweet odours filling the air, and a table of luxury daily spread before them, it was a hard battle to keep in subjection the cravings of sense, and live according to the dictates of a pure and spiritual faith. Some sharp stimulus was needed to prevent a people so situated from "*settling down on their lees.*" They must be "*emptied from vessel to vessel.*" By some suitable ordeal they must be prevented from indulging in "the lust of the eye, and the lust of the flesh." It was wise, it was needful to set them on great searchings of heart"—to cultivate self-denial and watchfulness on the one hand, and on the other to institute such external tests in the course of Divine Providence, as would infallibly indicate how the needle of the heart was pointing from time to time.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—*Verse* 1.

GOD OFTEN PROVES BUT NEVER TEMPTS.

He never puts any object before the mind with the intention of drawing it into sin, but He oftentimes applies touchstones to a man's character to ascertain what he really is. When the magnet is presented, immediately it draws the steel filings to it; but if there were no affinity in these filings with the magnet, they would not be drawn. Were evil neighbours brought round a man, if there were nothing in him in common with the characters and ways of these neighbours, he would not be attracted by their society but rather repelled, and induced to make a resolute stand against their errors and wickedness. But if, with a profession of righteousness, he is yet really ungodly in heart, and has no true love to God, then the presence of the wicked around him is certain to disclose the fact, that he is an alien to God. When God tries a man's character, He only brings to light the character which already exists. He never puts any evil into him which he had not before, nor does He ever stir up a man to commit sin, merely for the sake of committing it.

"Light might as soon become the cause of darkness, as holiness itself become the cause of unholiness. 'Tis a contradiction, that He who is the Fountain of good should become also the fountain of evil. Sweet waters and salt cannot come from the same spring. Men are said to be 'fitted to destruction,' but it is not said that God fits them. [The Greek verb is in the middle voice; it therefore must be read *self-fitted.*] They by their sins fit themselves for ruin, and He by His long suffering keeps it from them for a while. God cannot excite to that, which, when it is done, He will be sure to condemn. Sin would deserve no reproof from Him, if He were in some sense the author of it. If God were the author of it, why should our own consciences accuse us of it? It is God's deputy, and cannot accuse us of what the Sovereign Power itself inclines us to. Having laid down such severe laws to restrain men from sin, and having crucified His own Son, when acting as our sin-bearer, it cannot be, under any circumstances, that He should stir up or excite us to sin. A pure flame cannot engender cold, neither can darkness be the offspring of a sunbeam." [*Charnock.*]

"God neither deceives any man's judgment, nor perverts his will, nor seduces his affections, nor does anything else that can subject him to the blame of men's sins. Temptation, in the bad sense, always proceeds from the malice of Satan working on the corruptions of our own hearts. God may, however, consistently with all His perfections, by His providence bring His creatures into circumstances of *special probation*, not for the purpose of His receiving information, but in order to manifest to themselves and others the prevailing dispositions of their hearts. In this sense of putting to the proof—bringing to the test—the term is used in many other instances. In Deut. xiii. 3 it is said, 'The Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love Him with all your heart and soul.' Of Hezekiah it is said, 'In the business of the ambassadors, God left him to try him *(le-nas-soth-o)* that He might know all that was in his heart.' Indeed, we find this kind of trial is sometimes made a subject of petition, on the part of good men, as if they regarded it as an act of special favour (Ps. xxvi. 2). 'Examine me, O God, and prove me *(nassani)*, try my reins and my heart.' Also (in Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24), 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' Also (2 Cor. xiii. 5), 'Examine (πειραζετε)—try yourselves whether ye be in the faith—prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves,' etc."

[*Bush.*]

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 1–4.

III. This testing of character was made in love, not in anger. It was the doing of a wise and loving Father, not of an offended Lawgiver. For—

(1.) **All God's dealings with His covenant-people are necessarily in love.** This is the very spirit of His covenant: "Your God"—"God is *for* you"—always on your side. This is His fixed attitude. His love may assume many different forms, corresponding with the different phases presented of their character and conduct, but it is always love. When He chastens them for their sins, even going the length of scourging, it is still love that leads Him so to act by them. (Heb. xii. 6; invariable as in ver. 7.) His *threatenings* are the hoarse notes of His love. The *hidings of His face* in dark, providential dispensations are so, as in bereavement, adversity, or a sense of desolation, so that they cry out, "*All these things are against me!*" All *tests of character*, in like manner, are still but different forms which the covenant love assumes, working mysteriously, but not less sincerely or fervently. It is the love of an unchangeable God. "*He loves to the end.*" "*He rests in His love.*" The whole tone of His dealings is, "*I have loved with an everlasting love.*"

(2.) **It was love to prevent a breach of the covenant.** Though the covenant is everlasting, it is expressly on the condition that His law is observed and His name glorified. Most of the Divine promises are *conditional*; few of them *absolute*. Were no change of circumstances to take place from those under which they were made, they would remain without change. But where such an alteration of circumstance occurs, the very unchangeableness of the Divine character requires that there be some alteration in the promise itself, or that it be not carried out, for it was made only as applicable to certain circumstances, and where these no longer exist the promise cannot apply. God promised to bless His people with blessings, but it was only as a holy and obedient people that He could possibly do so, in consistency with His character as a holy God. On their ceasing to manifest this character, God's blessings towards them would cease to flow, yet not because of any change in His desire to love them, or fulfil His promises, but simply from the want of the necessary condition. The same character, however, always continuing, the promise would also always continue. There never was a promise made to carry a disobedient people into the land marked out for inheritance. For only loyal subjects of the God of Israel was it intended from the beginning. When, therefore, God dealt sharply with the sins of His people, He was really taking the direct course to prevent a direct breach of the covenant, and so was acting in the purest love.

(3.) **It was love to teach the heart the bitterness of sin.** That, in the first instance, is learned from the bitterness of its fruits. "*The end of these things is death.*" The chain becomes heavier at every step, for "*the way of transgressors is hard.*"

(*a*) *God hides His countenance when His people sin against Him.* "*I will go and return to My place till they acknowledge their offence,*" etc. (Hos. v. 15.) That is usually the case when they prove stubborn, and "will not frame their doings to turn unto their God." (Hos. v. 4.) Sin in any form is unspeakably abhorrent to His holy nature. Intercourse with Him, therefore, cannot be granted to His children till they come to view their sins as He does. He would impress on them, that it is an exceeding evil and bitter thing to forsake Him as their chief good, and "cast off His fear from before their eyes." (Ps. xxv. 14; Matt. v. 8; Heb. xii. 14.)

(*b*) *An evil conscience troubles the soul.* Conscience is either the best friend or the most terrible enemy the soul has. It is the echo of God's voice in the inner man. The trouble which it can raise in the soul is like a spiritual earthquake, so profoundly are all things unsettled by it. The pleasures of sin are felt to have been

purchased at a terrible price. "*Thou art the man!*" is rung in the ear with threatening emphasis, and the soul is glad at any price to buy back its former quietude. The sinner feels that his way is "hedged up with thorns," while "*trouble and anguish make him afraid*" on every side. "*A dreadful sound is in his ears. He is scared with dreams and terrified with visions.*" He cries out in the bitterness of his soul—

> "The fire that on my bosom preys
> Is lone as some volcanic isle;
> No torch is lighted at the blaze,
> A funeral pile!"

At last, feeling the hopelessness of carrying on a war with God, and remembering that His mercies are great, he thinks of confessing his sin and returning to Him from whom he has deeply revolted. He takes up the language of the penitent spouse, and says, "*I will go and return unto my first husband, for then it was better with me than now.*"

(*c*) *The mere cherishing of sinful thoughts in the soul causes misery.* They pollute and degrade. The feelings that necessarily accompany them are shame, dread, and self-reproach. The soul is conscious of being deeply dishonoured, as was Cain when banished from the presence of the Lord. Sin is felt to be a great humiliation. It is like a bird of paradise dropping to the ground from mid-heaven, and trailing its wings in the mire. It is felt to be something abnormal, as if the wheels of life were moving backward. It is something strangely unnatural for the creature to rise in rebellion against the author of its being; and when conscience is awake, the instinctive experience of the heart is a thrill of horror, or a feeling of disquiet that is prophetic of a danger we cannot measure. Sin means the giving over of man's nature to a vile use. It is the profanation of God's holy image, and the rendering of the great gift of an immortal life not only practically worthless, but converting it into a boundless and intolerable misery. It implies the perversion of every faculty of our rational nature, and a total eclipse of its spiritual loveliness. It darkens the understanding, deflects the will, deadens the conscience, corrupts the affections, and subjects the reason and the moral instincts to the service of the appetites and the passions. Sin is in all respects the bane of the soul, of which it must absolutely get rid, if life and happiness are to be enjoyed. Hence it is truest love to teach the bitterness of sin.

(4.) It is love to teach self-knowledge and humility.

(*a*) *Self-knowledge.* God's people knew little of the real state of their own hearts—what a small foundation of goodness there was in them, and how even that was entirely owing to the grace of God. Hence the innumerable mistakes they were ever falling into when giving promises for the future. It was true love to discover the foundation of all these mistakes; and the proof that was made of Israel by the discipline to which it was subjected, was for the instruction of Israel itself, quite as much as for any other reason. To know one's self is indispensable to make every other kind of knowledge valuable. The knowlege of ourselves as we stand before God is necessary in order to realise our guilt, and need of an Advocate—our vileness and need of cleansing. Heart-searching trials give this knowledge. Then our destitution of good, and natural corruption are made to appear. The man feels he must be speechless when the demand is made for a righteousness such as God can accept. A glance at that standard leads him to cry out, "*Woe is me! for I am undone!*"—"*in me dwelleth no good thing.*" The Laodicean Church imagined itself "rich," etc. until put to the test by the Searcher of hearts; then it was found to be "wretched," etc. (Rev. iii. 17).

(*b*) *Humility* goes with self-knowledge. "*God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee and prove thee, to know what was in thine*

heart," etc. (Deut. viii. 2). It is humbling to feel that we are dependent for everything on the will of another. But it is crushing to our pride to be told, at the place of judgment, that, "*from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in us, but all is wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores*," etc. The natural man's natural plea should be, "God be merciful to me—the sinner!" And when the natural man becomes the spiritual man, his natural language will be, "By the grace of God I am what I am!" Poverty of all native goodness, with alienation from God, and a tendency to evil thoughts and desires, will be found to be more or less the state of every heart when discovered to itself.

(5.) It is love where a false character exists to have the discovery of it made in good time. God's Israel was now beginning to prove "*an empty vine bringing forth fruit only to himself*." Had this been allowed to go on, justice must ere long have required that the tree be "*cut down as a cumberer of the ground*." Faithfulness to his interests prompted to the use of such means, as would seriously awaken his attention to the fact. Hence the trials which were now brought upon Israel. It is kind to "stony-ground" hearers to impress them with the fact that they have "no root" to their religion while going forward to meet the day of trial. For those who are "building on the sand," it is truest kindness to have it thundered in their ears, that they may not lose a moment in quitting their ground, and placing all that is precious on the solid rock. *Tests of the very strictest will be applied when the day of reckoning comes.* As travellers are searched for contraband goods on crossing the frontier, so when the soul passes the boundary line between time and eternity will it be searched, lest it should have about it such forbidden things as unbelief, deceit, pride, lusts and passions, covetousness, and the like. For "*they that cherish such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*." It is true kindness to have all the chaff winnowed out of our character on this side of time, that we may enter the solemn world beyond with the true wheat alone. Trials put us through this preliminary winnowing process.

SUGGESTIONS AND COMMENTS.—Verses 1–4.

The Importance of Having the Real Character Revealed.

I. Religious character is the most important thing about man before God. He is more important as a creature of intellect or imagination, of judgment or reasoning, than he is as an organism of flesh and blood. And in like manner he is greatly more important as an intelligence gifted with will, conscience, affections, and moral faculties, generally, than simply as a possessor of intellectual powers. Hence it is a spectacle of deeper interest to the Searcher of hearts, to behold the powers with which man worships and knows God, going out in proper exercise to their legitimate object, than to look on the exercise of the faculties which are either merely intellectual or physical.

God loves to see man's *heart* going out to Himself as its chief good, and its *affections* clinging to Him as the highest and best of all objects. He loves to see the *will*, amid all the oscillations in the stormy sea of life, always deciding according to God's will, as the needle follows the direction of the pole. He loves to see the *conscience* in man responding in perfect harmony to the teachings of the Divine law. He delights to see the *whole soul* bowing habitually in reverence before him. To his Creator, this is the most pleasing aspect which a creature made after His image can present.

And since man has lost this excellent disposition of his faculties, what

God now delights in is, to see his disordered nature beginning, through His grace, to get back somewhat of its original exquisite balance. Hence He loves to try them, especially His own children, that He may see whether the heart will come back to Him in new obedience.

II. The foundation of God's dealings with men must be made clear. It seems singular that God should apply tests to bring out men's characters, though He already absolutely knows them. But in ruling over a world of men, God deals with things as they appear at men's point of view. For Himself, He "knows what is in man," without any use of means. His eye reads character with equal clearness, as it exists in embryo in the heart, as when it comes to full developement in the life. It reads the first emotion, or purpose of the heart, with equal distinctness, as it does the lines of the countenance, or the doing of the hand. To him "the darkness and the light are both alike."

But that God may be glorified in the estimation of man, it is necessary that the grounds of His proceedure be to some extent made known to him. That of which He approves or disapproves must be made visible that man may understand the meaning of His providential rule; also men's characters must appear in their actual conduct, that it may be known why He chastises on the one hand and blesses on the other. The grounds of His moral government with men, are either, what is brought out in their conduct, or what in their hearts they know themselves to be.

III. Men do not know even their own hearts till they are tried. Tests are often used to bring to light unsuspected evils. Peter little thought he was capable, when put under the pressure of a strong trial, of denying his Lord. David little supposed that, when left to himself, he could have gone so far in presumptuous sin, as he did in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. Hezekiah, when he was sick, little dreamt that he could have acted so vainglorious a part, as he did in parading his wealth before the deputies of the king of Babylon. His friends never supposed that in the heart of so meek a man, vanity of so rank a growth should be found.

In like manner, the people who had been called by Jehovah's name, who had experienced numberless proofs of His fatherly care and love, and had had the most marvellous history the world ever saw, of Omnipotence itself interposing in their behalf, might have been expected to have been the most loyal of all people to their God, and the most unswerving in keeping His commandments. Yet at the very moment they were protesting fidelity, idolatry was appearing among them in the background, and ere long the mass of the people began to show an inveterate tendency to apostatize from the God of the covenant. It was fit that means should be used to bring out their real character, that they might know themselves.

The Deceptive Character of Sin.

"Sin deceives with appearing to be so little before it is committed. It seems so shallow, that I might wade through it dry-shod from any guiltiness; but when committed, it seems so deep, that I cannot escape without drowning. Thus I am always in extremities. Either my sins are so small, that they need not *my* repentance, or so great that they cannot obtain *thy* pardon." [*Thos. Fuller.*]

"Some children, when they first put on new shoes, are very careful to keep them clean. They will hardly touch the ground with their feet, lest they should dirty the soles of their shoes. Yet, perhaps, next day they will trample with the same shoes in the mire up to

their ankles. Children's play is our earnest. On the day of vowing we are overscrupulous in our professions, yet, soon after, we wade in sin up to the ankles—nay, they go over our heads." [*Thos. Fuller.*]

The Uses of Discipline.

"The stones from the wall said, We come from the mountains far away—from the sides of the craggy hills. Fire and water worked on us for ages, but only made us crags. Human hands have made us into a dwelling, where the children of an immortal race are born, suffer, and rejoice; act their part during the morning of their existence, and perform the duties which belong to their earthly state of existence. But we have passed through much to fit us for this. Gunpowder has rent our very heart; pickaxes have cleaved and broken us; to us it seemed without meaning, as we lay misshapen stones in the quarry. Gradually we were cut into blocks, and some of us were chiselled with finer instruments to a sharper edge. But we are complete now—are in our places, and are of service. You are in the quarry still, not complete, and much seems inexplicable. But you are destined for a higher building; and one day you will be put in it by hands not human—a living stone in a living Temple." [*Parables in Household Things.*]

Self-searching is an imperative duty in the first instance, "Examine yourselves—prove your own selves." Much unsuspected sin exists in the hearts of the best of men which trial brings to light. The pond is often clear on the surface, but when it is stirred much foul sediment is found to have been lying at the bottom.

"'*Whose fan is in His hand.*' Well it fits Him, and He it. Could *Satan's* clutches snatch the fan, what work he would make! He would winnow in a tempest and throw the best away. Had *man* the fan, out goes for chaff all that are opposed to the opinions of his party. But the fan is in a wise and faithful hand. Only He who knows the heart is fit to hold it." [*Thos. Fuller.*]

MAIN HOMILETICS.—*Verse 4.*

IV. Obedience is with God the all-important requirement.

"To keep the commandments of the Lord" was the people's term in the sacred covenant. *To bless* was God's term; *to obey* was reasonably that of the people. "*Fear God and keep His commandments; this is the whole duty of man.*" To find the fruits of righteousness in the life, was the revenue of glory, which the Creator looked for in bringing His creature into existence. Never was the duty of obedience to the laws and statutes of the great Jehovah, more solemnly and affectingly impressed on men's hearts and consciences, than in the illustration which we find in the book of Deuteronomy, from chap. iv. and onward. This, too, is the burden of every exhortation addressed by the servants of the Lord to the people. It is the natural condition laid down on which eternal life may be enjoyed. "*If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*"

1. Obedience is the index which shows that the heart is right with God. Not more certainly do the movements of the hands on the dial-plate indicate that the machinery is working correctly within, than does a regular walking in the way of God's commandments prove, that the heart is faithful in its allegiance to its God. As the exercise of walking calls into play all the parts and faculties of the body, so does obedience call into exercise all the faculties, feelings, and principles of the soul, so that it becomes the offering of the whole man to God.

It is the complement and the crown of devotion, meditation, and experimental feeling, and is the forthcoming of inward principle and inward purpose.

2. **Obedience springs naturally from the fear and the love of God.** The fear of God implies reverence for His authority, and shows itself by keeping His commandments. These two are always conjoined together in Scripture, as root and flower. But love must go with fear, for fear without love would be cold; but love produces the enthusiasm of fear.

3. **In the Gospel obedience must spring from love.** There man is dealt with as guilty, and so as having lost the true fear of God. This can only be got back through love. Love in the form of "love to Christ" becomes the spring of new obedience. "The great God, before whom man has fallen, restores him to obedience by leaving the throne of judgment, and coming down to him as a Friend and a Saviour. He descends, step by step, into closer relations of alliance, and binds men to Himself by personal ties until He reaches the lowest step, which is also the highest, for lowest condescension is highest love. He becomes one with men in all respects, especially in becoming sin that He might fully establish the claim of love, and so create obedience by attraction rather than command it by law. The Christian character of obedience is not built up like a cold and lifeless column, stone by stone—it grows like a tree from within, and its root is love to Christ." [*Ker.*]

4. **Obedience in the Gospel is the obedience of children.** Those who continue to live ungodly after being dealt with by gospel motives, are called "sons of disobedience," while those who yield to the gospel call are regarded as "obedient children" (see Eph. ii. 2 and 1 Peter i. 14). The love and the honour which are implied in making them "sons of God," are mighty motives to inspire them with an obedience that "runs in the way of God's commandments." "Of all children, the children of God are most obliged to obedience, for He is both the wisest, and the most loving of Fathers. The sum of all His commands is, that they endeavour to resemble Him (Matt. v. 48; Lev. xi. 44). The imitation of this highest pattern—this primitive goodness—is the top of excellency. It is well said, '*summa religionis est imitari quem colis.*' Children that resemble their fathers, as they grow in years grow the liker to them; so the children of God increase in resemblance, and are daily more and more renewed in His image. [*Leighton.*]

"All obedient believers are of near kin to Jesus Christ. They wear His name, bear His image, have His nature, are of His family. He loves them, and converses with them as His relations. He bids them welcome to His table, takes care of them, provides for them, and sees that they want for nothing. When He died, He left them rich legacies; now that He is in heaven, He keeps up a correspondence with them, and will in nothing fail to do the kinsman's part. [*Henry.*]

5. **Obedience must be shown in the face of opposition.** To show that it is not propped up merely, but has a root of its own. It must be of a robust, and not a sickly nature—able to withstand the force of a thousand breezes, and be only all the more firmly rooted in the soil. Steadfastness of obedience is very gloryfying to God. "Caleb had another spirit in him, and followed the Lord fully. He had no apprehensions when he looked at the dangers. He offered no objections and raised no difficulties. He had entire confidence in his God. The chariots of iron, the cities with walls up to heaven, the giant sons of Anak—all were nothing. With the eye of faith, he saw the Lord of Hosts going forth to battle before him, and treading down all enemies under His feet. 'Only rebel not ye against the Lord,' were his noble words. Consequences he left to omnipotence; his concern simply was to do his duty. Similarly did Nehemiah act. When all around him were giving way before the formidable dangers that were ever rising up, his uniform language was, 'So did not I, because of the fear of God.'" [*Gisborne.*]

THE KIND OF OBEDIENCE DUE TO GOD.

1. It must have respect to *the authority* of God. It does this or that from the motive, "Thus saith the Lord."

2. It ought to be *the best, and the most exact.* The best of the flock was laid on the altar. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings as in obeying the voice of the Lord?"

3. It must be *sincere, and inward.*

4. It must be *sole* obedience (Matt. iv. 10; Acts iv. 18, 19).

5. It must be *universal.*

6. It must be *indisputable.* Readiness in the subject is of the essence of true obedience. This the centurion had from his soldiers, and God ought to have from all His servants. "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth." Thus did Abraham (Gen. xxii. 3).

7. It ought to be *joyful.* "Meat and drink to do the will of our Father in heaven." "I delight to do thy will, O, my God.

8. It ought to be *perpetual.* As man is a subject as soon as he is a creature, so he is a subject as long as he is a creature. God's sovereignty is of perpetual duration as long as He is God. And as God cannot part with His sovereignty, neither can man be exempted from his subjection. Obedience is continued in heaven.

[*Charnock.*]

It should also be:—

1. *Childlike* and *implicit.*
2. *Single-intentioned.*
3. *Unconstrained.*
4. *Eager and hearty.*
5. *All round the circle of duty.*
6. *Pure in motive and aim.*
7. *Faithful and true.*
8. *Unfaltering and firm.*

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 1, 3, 5.

II. God's choice of instruments.

Scripture does not give us history from man's point of view. It sees God as "King of all the earth," reigning over the heathen and them that know Him not. So here, when describing the pivot on which the whole history turns, we do not read that the Canaanites, having recovered from the prostration caused them by the desolating sweep of the sword of Joshua, gathered up their strength anew to expel the presumptuous invaders of their territories, or try to crush them with a grinding servitude. But what is brought before us is, what the hand of the Lord did, and the instruments whom He employed to do His work. We are taught:—

1. God designates **His own agency to do His work.** "The Lord left these nations to prove Israel," etc. It did not come about through the chances of war, through the turning of the wheel of fortune, or through the changes of time, which are always bringing up results that surprise us. The God who helped His people for the destruction of these nations for their sins, now, because of the apostasy of His people, strengthens these nations against them and employs them as fit instruments for doing His chastening work. *He not only permits them to do what they did, but He gives them a Divine commission for doing it.* As if He had said, "Go and scourge my people because of their grievous sins." It is not any agencies at random that are so chosen, but certain specific nations whom the Divine wisdom selects. Besides the glory accruing to the Divine name from the doing of any work, there is the additional glory arising from the *manner* of doing it, God designates the instruments that He reckons the fittest—*those, by whose doing it, most instruction will be conveyed.* He puts His finger on the agencies He means to employ, and calls over their names at length in the hearing of all. He gives them in charge the particular work they have to do, and they

are told off for the doing of it,—though all the while they know Him not, and do the work in reality from quite other motives, than that of a desire to serve and honour Him. Yet He puts His mark upon them beforehand, that it may be known that they are in His employment, so that what is done by them, may be understood to be really done by Him through their agency.

2. **God selects His instruments from the camp of His enemies equally with His friends.** His enemies do not cease to be His subjects, and His creatures though they have become rebels. He has not lost His right to command, though they have lost their will to obey. They are equally at His disposal with any of the loyal races, that people His dominions. Nor does He need to put any constraint on their free wills, to make them serve His purposes. He is so superior to them in the conduct of His moral government, as to lead them, all unconsciously, to carry out special designs and purposes of His own, while they have no other thought than to gratify their malicious purposes and cruel intentions.

(1.) **God makes use of the enemies of His people as a rod to chastise them.** They had ends of their own to serve. They wished to have some severe retaliation inflicted on these intruders from the wilderness, for having the best part of their country, taken from them, also their corn, their wine and their oil, and indeed for a complete spoliation made of their whole stock-in-trade, so that they were left with only fragments of territory, now in their possession. These Moabites, Canaanites, Philistines, Midianites and others, thought they were only favoured with excellent opportunities of taking revenge. Yet God was merely for a time—a time determined by His wisdom and love—delivering over His people to chastisement for their backslidings, that He might ere long convince them of the wisdom and necessity of returning unto Himself.

(2.) **God has a place in His plans for the wicked to praise Him.** "*The Lord hath made all things for Himself, even the wicked for the day of evil.*" Even some of the plagues of Egypt, it is said, were inflicted by God's "sending evil angels among them." Balaam God made use of to bless His people, when Balak would have cursed them altogether. Satan was made use of as an instrument to bring out, by his wicked devices, the utter spotlessness of the Saviour's character. The efforts made by principalities and powers against man's substitute, while they were allowed to do their worst as He hung on the cross, to get Him to mar His great work of silent uncomplaining suffering under the curse—by murmuring against God for the bitterness of the cup He was called on to drink, or by throwing up the cause of guilty men on account of their extreme ingratitude and wickedness—these, from their entire failure to gain their purpose, were overruled by God to bring out the perfect character of the offering made, on which men might build their hopes for the eternal future. Not only was the redeeming work not stopped—till the Sufferer could say, "It is finished"—but the gloriously excellent character of the work is brought out by the very efforts that were made to stop it.

3. **A sinning people often supply the means of their own correction.** The whole of these Canaanites were marked out for destruction. Their cup was full, the sentence against them was gone forth, and the people of Israel were appointed to execute it. So long as the firm hand of Joshua was at the helm, all went well, but when that hand withered in death, there was no other to strike in, and finish what was so well begun. It became irksome to put to death every idolater, young and old. Forgetful of the sins, of these Canaanites, and forgetful of the sacred charge laid upon them by their God to exterminate them, the people gradually shrunk back from their fulfilment of the duty, partly through sloth, and still more through the risks they ran in measuring swords with these stalwart natives of the soil. *They did their work by halves, and came to the best terms they could with these enemies of their God.* They lived with them as

neighbours, and did business with them as traders. The demand made was virtually, to "cut off the right hand;" they chose instead to disobey their God; and, in righteous wisdom, God made their sin become the means of their punishment.

Did *they* spare the Canaanites? *He* also spared them, and allowed them to increase, and become strong in the land—the result being, that they became enemies always lying in ambush, and waiting their opportunity for slaking their thirst for revenge. Too truly did they prove "snares," "traps," and "scourges." Had they been entirely rooted out, how many halcyon days of peace and true happiness would Israel have enjoyed, in a land which seemed little less than Paradise regained! How differently would their story have run! But their "*own wickedness did correct them, their backslidings did reprove them.*" Had Lot not sat down among the Sodomites, though well aware of the danger of moral contact with them, he would never have had such a fiery trial to go through in the end—with property lost and himself saved only "as by fire." If David had not put his trust in the Philistines, instead of going forward in the path of duty, with his confidence solely in his God, he would have escaped the dire experience of that miserable morning, when he came upon the smoking ruins of Ziklag, and suddenly found the world turned into a desert before him!

"The sinners' hands do make the snares
Wherewith themselves are caught."

4. God can turn the most unlikely persons into fit instruments for doing His work.

(1.) **These nations were unlikely instruments for doing God's work.** What purpose can be served by brambles, or upas trees growing in the garden of the Lord? What benefit to God's church could ever be rendered by a people, that had sold themselves "*to do evil, only evil, and that continually,*" and who were now regarded as "reprobate"? How could it ever consist with propriety, that animals of the wolf species should lie down in the same fold with God's sheep? Infallibly the wolf nature must quickly show itself, and deadly mischief be done. Yet the circumstances being abnormal, God uses an abnormal method of meeting them, and a valuable end is gained.

(2.) **They served as tests of Israel's character.** As it was of their own choosing, God left His people to live side by side with the Canaanite, looking daily at the spectacle of idolatrous practices set before their eyes, so that it might be seen whether they would be allured by the objects and the ways of sin, and whether the needle of the heart pointed to the pole of allegiance, or that of apostasy. Had they been decided to "cleave to the Lord," they would have rejected all the overtures used to turn them aside, but if secretly inclined to idol worship, they must certainly show it by the manner of associating with their sinful neighbours. The presence of these ungodly transgressors had the same influence on the ungodly heart, as the magnet has on the steel filings. Israel cannot be passive. If so, they were certain to be carried down the stream; if conscientious in their opposition to every feature and form of the prevailing sin, they must rouse themselves from their apathy, and resolutely take their stand on the side of Jehovah. The presence of these idol-worshippers was a touch-stone of character for the professing people of God.

(3.) **Such a presence was a loud call to the exercise of prayer and faith.** The Israelites, as a rule, were but children in the hands of strong men before these giant races. It was not by sword or spear they could hope to succeed in war, but only by earnest wrestling prayer, and the pleading of Divine promises specially given. Thus only could they hope that omnipotence would interpose on their behalf, and *faith* must ever enter into *prayer*. "*Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*"

Great faith in God's word, and deep dependence on Him for hourly and daily protection, were specially called for. To believe that, in ways known only to Himself, He would deliver His people out of the hands of their enemies in due time, if they but proved true to Him—not to trust in human strength, skill, training, resources, or any thing of that kind, as the origin of the deliverance; but to trust that God Himself would be with them, and find the means of fighting their battles successfully in answer to believing prayer and righteous living before Him—that was to fight the "wars of Canaan" in the old spirit.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—*Verses* 1, 3, 4.

God Glorified by the Instrumentality He Employs to Execute His Will.

I. By the variety of instruments He employs. We seldom find that the same nation twice over is employed to oppress Israel. As a rule, in each new case it is a different nation, and different kind of nation from the last that is employed.

(1.) **God would have transgressors to learn how full His quiver is of arrows, so that it is impossible to contend with him in battle.** He could in a moment make all things become our enemies. It is "as if a man did flee from a lion and a bear met him, or he went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him."

(2.) **He would show how many unsuspected instruments of death are all around the wicked, but for His preventing their action.** How easily could all the nations have been turned against Israel together, instead of one at a time! and how many were there of them! But for Divine protection, they were in constant peril. The Egyptians never suspected it was such a terrible thing to contend with the God of the nation they held in captivity, till they found the vast variety and terrible character of the weapons which He could bring against them—in turning their waters into blood, filling their houses with frogs, making the dust of the land become lice, filling the air with swarms of flies, and again with swarms of locusts, smiting down all herbs and trees of the land by destructive hail mingled with fire, sending a murrain on the beasts, and severe boils on the men and women, not to speak of the terrible doom of all the firstborn. "Thou, even Thou, art to be feared, and who may stand in Thy sight, when once Thou art angry?" He does not need to go to a distance for troops to fight His battles. He can raise them up at hand at a moment's notice when the occasion requires. Happy are the people that are protected by the God of Jacob as their God.

(3.) **It suggests the thought that the universe itself is but a vast armoury, full of instruments at the disposal of Jehovah, to carry out His will.** (Ps. ciii. 19.) The armies that are in heaven are His armies—"His hosts," that do His pleasure. The place of supreme power is also the home of the good, and by all such His will is done. That world is a model of obedience. His will is done naturally, freely, implicitly, universally. It is done joyfully, swiftly, enthusiastically. There "His servants do serve Him, resting not day nor night in His service." "Their plume never droops, their fervour never sleeps." The swift-winged seraphim, with outstretched wing, stand ready, at a moment's notice, to fly through the heavens, to execute the behests that issue from the throne before which they stand. In the kingdom of Providence, He who rules is attended by multitudes of spirits that are in the midst of the wheels, that are "full of eyes," by whom the wheels are turned, and all of whom "go straight forward." In fulfilling the instructions given them, these agents "run and return like a

flash of lightning," to show the extreme alacrity of their obedience. The very lightnings of heaven, when they hear His voice, report themselves and say, "Here we are!"

"*He has all the creatures at His beck, and can commission any of them to be a dreadful scourge.* Strong winds and tempests fulfil His word. He can make an army of locusts become as mischievous as an army of lions; can forge the meanest creatures into swords and arrows, and commission the most despicable to be His executioners. He can never want weapons who is Sovereign over the thunders of heaven, and the stones of the earth, and can, by a single word, turn our comforts into curses. He calls the caterpillar and the palmer-worm His "great army," that climb walls without opposition, and march without breaking their ranks. *He can restrain men from carrying out evil designs against His people.* He kept back Saul, who, like a hawk, was pursuing David as a partridge among the mountains, when a special message came, that the Philistines had invaded the land, so that the persecutor was obliged to go elsewhere. He also put a check on the wicked men, who had gone so far in their malice as to crucify the Lord of glory, so that at first they did not absolutely oppose the preaching of the cross by the apostles. He that restrained the roaring lion of hell himself, also restrained his whelps on earth. The lions out of the den, as well as those in the den, are bridled by Him in favour of His Daniels." [*Charnock.*]

II. By the liberty of action He allows to those who are held as instruments in His hands. God never restrains the free action of the human will. If He did so, it would destroy the foundation of human responsibility. That rests on the fact, that man is free to decide according to his pleasure. Were he not free so to decide, the decision would not be his, but that of another by whom his will was coerced. We say nothing at present about the depravity of the will, and of its constant inclination to evil. Every man is conscious that, notwithstanding his depravity of nature, his will is still free; he is not compelled either by God to do a good act, or by Satan to do an evil one. However much he may be influenced by others, he yet feels that every act which he does is his own act.

Men's freedom of action consistent with God's control over them as instruments. When God employed any of these kings, such as Eglon or Chushanrishathaim, to test the character of Israel and to chastise them, He was not known to either of those kings, nor did He begin by making Himself known to them. Their hearts were already entirely in His hands, and He could turn them as he pleased, though He should remain entirely unknown to them. He has Himself laid down the laws by which the movements of every heart are regulated, and in all His dealings with men, He shows respect to the laws which He has laid down. He has made it a rule of our nature, that the will should be influenced by *motives*, and of these motives, however numerous they may be, He has such an *absolute knowledge*—both of actual and possible motives—and also such an *absolute control* of these motives, in adjusting them in any manner he pleases, in the case of every individual heart, that he can foretell, and even fix beforehand with infallible exactness, what the decision of that will shall be, in regard to any one matter, without in the slightest degree interfering with its freedom of action.

Practical Illustration. The motives present to the minds of these two heathen kings, which induced them to go against Israel to oppress them, were as far as possible, away from any idea of causing Israel to pass through a salutary discipline, and this by the command of Israel's God. They were altogether the reverse of what could be pleasing to that holy God. Yet He, of set design, allowed them to go forward with their own evil intentions in view, just in so far as it suited His own purpose, but not a moment longer.

Then the current was changed, or was entirely stopped. Their motives were a desire for revenge, thirst for conquest, exaction of tribute, an extension of territory, and especially a boasting of the superiority of their gods. The incentives to their action were thus entirely wrong, but the action itself was exactly in the direction of the Divine purposes, and God was pleased to use them as His instruments accordingly. In acting from such motives, or with a view to such ends, they deeply incurred the wrath of Jehovah, more especially for these two things—*their maltreatment of a nation that was now sacred in God's estimation.* "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." Also, for *their daring to slight the authority, and despise the name of Israel's God.* On these two accounts mainly, great wrath went forth from Jehovah against them, which ended in their destruction.

Assyria and Babylon were long employed as God's instruments in punishing the nations for their sins. But to punish them for their sins against Jehovah, was not their meaning in doing what they did (Is. x. 6, 7). When therefore the work was done, the manner in which the rod had dared to shake itself against Him who wielded it came before God in judgment, and it was flung out of His hand as fuel into the fire (Is. x. 12–15). Babylon also was wielded by the Ruler among the nations as His battle-axe and hammer, and a whole list of nations was marked out for him to destroy (Jer. xxv.), and another list was made out to be put in servitude (Jer. xxvii.). But the executioner of God's designs in these cases had wicked motives in his heart, and wicked aims before his eyes, and his time of reckoning also came. Babylon was "rolled down from the rocks," and broken in pieces, because of all the "evil it had done in Zion," and of the contempt with which it had treated the sacred name of Jehovah (Jer. l. and li.)

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 1, 2, 4.

III. The tendency of the covenant people to apostatise from their God.

This is always the most visible thing in the page of Israel's history. Other things may be traced only in faint and indistinct lines; but this is always broadly marked.

1. **It is what might have been least expected.** Situated as they were, they were the most favourable specimen of the human race to show the spirit of true allegiance. None were so highly privileged; none so well trained; none had such an excellent parentage; none had been the children of so many prayers; none were the heirs of so many promises; none had had set before them such force of motive in the noble obedience of a remarkably pious ancestry; none had had such striking patterns of fidelity to God set before them in the case of their national leaders; none had seen such a series of gracious interpositions of the hand of Omnipotence on their behalf;—in short, nothing but the firmest attachment to the God of their fathers, might have been expected of these children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—Abraham, the "friend of God;" Isaac, the man of devout meditation and readiness to sacrifice his life at the call of his God; Jacob, the man who, as a prince above other men, had power even with God in prayer, and prevailed. What a force of holy example did such men leave behind them for the good of their descendants!" What specimens of faith, of self-denial, and true fear of God did they exhibit!" Under what a hallowed roof-tree were their children cradled! Could a richer or fatter soil be found in which to plant the young shoots of a coming generation? Did ever richer dews or warmer breezes come from the Lord to foster any flowers that were put into His garden, than in the case of that generation which "entered

into the rest" of the lion-hearted Joshua? And yet if anything is clear about them, it is that they showed a tendency to apostatise from their God!

2. The root-cause lies in the depravity of the human heart. There is within men an "evil heart of unbelief departing from the living God." The character of the fountain is seen in the muddy nature of the stream. The disposition of the heart to go away from God, is not occasional or changeable, but it is in the very constitution, and is abiding. "*The carnal mind is enmity against God.*" The current flows uniformly in one and the same direction. Its tendency is fixed. After the miserable exhibition made by the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, what shall be said for the children of any other class of parents? We fear nothing can come out of it but the old conclusion, which we must write down once more—"*there is none that doeth good, no not one!*"

3. Remissness of parental training one of the immediate causes. The generation that formed the Israel of the day in this third chapter, were not those who had *seen* the Divine wonders of power and grace that distinguished the golden age of the immediate past, but those who followed after, and had only *heard* of such mighty acts. But no duty was more imperative on those who had seen and taken part in them, than to imprint the whole record diligently on the minds and memories of the rising generation. This was the fixed rule with regard to the whole history of this people from age to age—that one generation should instruct the one that followed it, and that again those that followed after, in regular succession. This was a binding duty (Ps. lxxviii. 3–8; Deut. vi. 2, 7–9, 20–25).

Parental training had a very important place among God's people, for, first—

(*a*) *God meant the lessons imparted to one age to be learned equally by all succeeding ages.* He deals with all the generations of Israel as but one people. He appeals to any one generation by arguments drawn from what He had done to previous generations, or from obligations undertaken by these previous generations, as if they were identical with the generation immediately addressed. And this bond of intimate union of the different generations in one people, could only be sustained by a very full, faithful, and persevering course of instruction and pious example, such as is implied in the exercise of parental training.

(*b*) *The children were taken into the covenant equally with the parents.* Hence parental training became a sacred duty. The children are expressly mentioned as being present, along with their fathers and mothers, at the first great convocation, held when they were being devoted to the Lord as a whole people, in view of their being about to enter the land of their inheritance. (Deut. xxix. 10–13). The charge of obedience is laid on the children equally with the parents (Deut. xxx. 2).

(*c*) *A special command for instructing the children in God's law was given in perpetuity.* Once every seven years was the great law of the covenant to be read aloud in the hearing of all Israel, and the children were then to be specially instructed (Deut. xxxi. 9–13).

(*d*) *The young people of the early ages of Israel's history were specially dependant on parental training.* In times when *writing* was rare, *reading* as an art must have been very imperfect. Thus the young received all their knowledge in the form of oral instruction from the old. Besides, this dependance was all the greater, that the instructions which the young Israelites received from their God, were so widely different from those required of the children whose parents worshipped other gods, and required much greater self-denial.

(*e*) *Difficulties of parental training under the circumstances.* This training was conducted with fewer facilities, and amid more discouraging circumstances, than it is with us, so that less good fruit might reasonably be looked for than we are accustomed to do. From the severity of the trial of character, to which the

whole people were subjected in so strongly idolatrous an atmosphere, those who were false in profession would quickly become supine in the discharge of duties for which they had no heart, while among the steadfast few there would be many a David, who never said to his Adonijah, "What doest thou?" or many an Eli, who "heard of his sons making themselves vile," through idolatrous practices, and "he restrained them not." And there might be few Abrahams, of whom God said as to parental training, "I know Abraham, that he will command his children, and household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." Thus may we account, in considerable part, for the subsidence into idolatrous practices, which quickly became general over the land.

IV. Each new generation requires in some degree to be taught by an experience of its own.

Parental training is not enough. It seems strange that both a history, and a law, which were so repeatedly impressed on the minds of the whole people, first under Moses, and then under Joshua, should not have so penetrated into the very heart of the nation, as to have been engraven with an iron pen, to last for many generations, if not for ever. And yet those laws which were proclaimed literally in notes of thunder from heaven, and those facts of extraordinary strength, which make up the stirring history of Joshua's days, seem not to have got so deep into the minds of the Israelitish nation, but that in the very next generation, there was need for farther instruction in the same lessons. Those who had not actually seen the doing of the Lord, and witnessed the operations of His hand, required to be put through, on a small scale, the experience of the fathers. This teaches the following lessons:—

1. **The strange incapacity of the human heart for receiving Divine lessons.**

(*a*) *Scripture*—makes it the cardinal error of our fallen race, that "*there is none that have understanding to seek after God*" as the first thing a creature should do (Rom. iii. 11). The people that were of all others the best instructed in the knowledge of God, who were taught it all their life, through "precept on precept, line on line," are yet continually charged with being "*a nation void of counsel, neither having any understanding*"—"*fools and blind*"—even "*sottish children*," "*who have eyes and see not, ears and hear not, whose hearts have waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing*,"—who know less of their God in the spiritual world, than "the stork in the heaven, the turtle, the crane, and the swallow" know of the laws which affect them in the natural world. Even the knowledge of "the ox," and "the ass," for practical purposes, is said to be superior to that of God's own people. Well may the account be wound up with the statement, "*my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*. And they are suitably addressed in such lines as these:—

"Ye brutish people understand,
Fools! when wise will ye grow?"

(*b*) *Experience.* As regards practical proof, we might say, it would take a less force to make water and oil mix together, than to induce the human heart to take an everlasting embrace of God's holy truth.

(*c*) *The names given to man in his natural state.* Take one as a specimen—the name "*Fool*," so often applied to those who know not God. This word not only indicates that man is *ignorant*, and *without discretion*, but also that he is *unimprovable, under a spell*, or *infatuated*. And the difficulty of teaching a fool any lesson of practical wisdom, is that he has no natural receptivity for it. "*Reproof entereth more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool.*" Yea, "*though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his foolishness depart from him*" (Prov. xvii. 10; xxvii. 22). Those who cannot catch God's meaning at once, by a slight indication, or a significant movement of the eye, must be treated like the dull horse or mule who understand

nothing save the bridle, or the lash (Ps. xxxii. 8, 9). What stubbornness characterises the human heart in receiving God's holy truth!

2. Personal experience is the most effective method of teaching. The persons now to be instructed are those, who "had not known the wars of Canaan" by personal experience. God was now to put them through some of the experience, which the fathers had to go through. No knowledge is so effectually gained, as that which comes in this manner. Teaching by testimony, or report, exercises but a slight influence, compared with that which is gained by personally passing through all the circumstances of any particular scene.

(*a*) *A more vivid impression is made.* It is when knowledge passes in direct, through the five gates of the senses, that it gets the best hearing from the understanding, and makes the deepest impression on the heart. Everything is distinctly realised, and felt to be an actual fact. All passes before the eye and is no dream. There is no comparison, as to vividness of impression made by things known through personal experience, and things known only by hearsay.

(*b*) *Personal interests are more deeply touched.* It was one thing for this people to believe it as a tale that was told them, that through the Divine promise given, it was possible to fight all the giants and subdue mighty armies, for that had now become matter of history. But to see the lions at hand, to witness with their own eyes the ferocious Canaanites mustering their forces to battle, with a weight of armour, strength of bone and muscle, and equipment for the field far superior to their own, while yet they were successful in the conflict—this was to give the knowledge of experience, and teach what mighty things *prayer* could do, when it had Divine promises to plead—what *trust* in the character of the covenant God could do—and what good issue could arise from *obedience* to the Divine commandments in the practical duties of life.

Examples.—It was said of the good *Richard Cecil*, when leaving a sick bed, where he had been confined for upwards of six weeks, a friend remarked to him he had lost much precious time lying on that couch. "No," he replied, "the time has not been lost. I have learned more within these curtains during these weeks, than I learned during all my academical course at the university." *Joseph*, too, learned the lessons which served him so well in after life, more effectually in the pit of Dothan, and the dungeons of Egypt, amid cruelty, injustice, and desertion of friends, than he ever could have done under the wing of parental indulgence in his natural home. Suffering is the most effective of teachers.

3. Each generation must have a character of its own, and answer for itself. The parent cannot believe for the child, neither can the child inherit the faith, the prayerful spirit, and the religious worth of the parent merely from the fact that he is a child. However valuable the inheritance of piety, of faith, and godliness, left by those who had gone before, it was still imperative on the young generations after Joshua's days, to know for themselves the sacred principles, by observing which they gained possession of their inheritance, and still retained it in possession. God dealt with each generation according to its own character, sending evil and dark days, or days of bright sunshine and prosperity, as their conduct was pleasing or displeasing to His Holy eye.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 1, 2, 4.

The Difficulty of Getting Divine Truth into the Heart.

1. How much care and many arguments are used in vain. Why so much pains taken to instruct the coming generations. If the heart had been ordinarily willing to receive such precious truths, and to be taught such impressive lessons, no argument would have been necessary, and the only diffi-

culty would have been to have rejected them. Yet arguments need to be employed for a whole lifetime, and kept up from generation to generation, to keep the people at the exercise of faith and obedience—sad proof that the "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," etc.

2. The facility with which the heart lets slip the Divine teachings. It is like "the morning cloud and the early dew." What earnest effort and intense anxiety are needed to retain truth which is already imparted! "*Give earnest heed to the things you have heard, lest you should drift away from them*" (see Heb. ii. 1, revised version). "Take fast hold—keep—let not go" (Prov. iv. 13). As oil runs off water without uniting with its drops, so do God's most impressive teachings pass off without mixing with the deep convictions of the heart. The young Israelites of the next generation, doubtless, heard a great deal about the glorious transactions of their national history, which made them the envy and the wonder of every land. The mere tale of such deeds should have sufficed, to rivet in their hearts for ever a sense of their obligations to the covenant God. Yet how faint the impression made! At the first rough blast of trial, it was found they had such a slender hold of religious principle that they gave up the services of Jehovah and accepted those of Baal.

3. When milder means do not suffice to educate men in religious duty, sterner measures are held in reserve. When these young Israelites would not listen to the quiet teachings of faithful parents, they had ere long to go forth and meet the Canaanite in the open field, and learn, in the stern work of actual war, those lessons which they were so slow to acquire around the domestic hearth. What an illustration of the inveterate tendency of the heart to reject and push aside spiritual appeals! It remains,

> "Though woo'd and aw'd,
> A flagrant rebel still."

When the father's kindly hand and the mother's soft touch had no effect, God's people must be given up to the handling of the rugged nurse—Adversity, that through her more rigorous discipline they might, by any means, come to learn practical wisdom.

Pious Parents may have Erring Children.

1. Religious character does not depend on natural birth.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh." The corrupt nature which is common to our race is transmitted by natural law. Proofs of this are unfailingly given in every life. "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not." The undoubtedly pious son of the God-fearing Jesse tells us, he did not get his piety from his parentage. He says, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." And the Saviour affirms that every man, to be fit for His kingdom, must be "born again." Thus, no generation, however pious, can give security that their children will be the same that they have been. The result is, that none are pious by birth. "Grace does not run in the blood," as Eli, Aaron, Noah, David, and even Samuel (1 Sam. viii. 3, 5), knew to their cost.

2. Yet the children of godly parents are often pious. Though grace does not run in the blood, *it does often run in the line.* The line of Seth seems to have been the line of the godly, and it continued for centuries. The line of Eleazar's priesthood appears to have gone on from the day that the people took possession of their inheritance, until the day when they were driven out of it into captivity, with only a few breaks (from Eli to the expulsion of Abiathar, 1 Kings ii. 27)—or more than a thousand years—most of whom, if not all, appear to have been men worthy of their office. The line of Abraham is also a strong case.

3. Special advantages belong to the seed of the godly. There is—

(1). **The standing special promise which God makes to all believing parents.** "I will be a God to thee and thy seed after thee." It is indeed conditional; but when the condition is fulfilled, or in the degree in which it is fulfilled, the promise is sure.

(2). **They are usually the children of many prayers.** Where parents neglect this duty it is cruelty to the children. Every parent should not only pray, but "travail in birth" again, till Christ is born in every child that God has given them. Look at the mothers of Augustine and John Newton.

(3). **They have commonly the benefit of a good example set before them.** This, though not alone sufficient, has in it all the teaching force which the silent presentation of religious realities can give. Example is often more effectual than precept.

(4). **They are usually the subjects of a pious training.** Parents who fear God themselves are required to "bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." They also have the promise, "Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

(5). **For the most part they are in the company of the righteous.** They are led "in the footsteps of the flock." The natural principle of *imitation*—so strong in the young mind—is thus utilised to lead them to do as the righteous do.

4. Illustration of a degenerate seed springing from godly parents. The generation that entered Canaan under Joshua, are supposed to have been more pious than almost any other through the whole history of that people. Of this we have proof in the great outstanding fact, that "by faith they subdued kingdoms," over the whole length and breadth of the land (Joshua ii.–xi). Another proof of fidelity to principle we have in Joshua xxii. Yet a large number of their children, and nearly all their grandchildren, became idolaters, and required dealing of the severest kind to bring them back to God.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 5–11.

Great Sin and Severe Chastisement.

Critical Notes.—5. And the children of Israel dwelt.] Here are two downward steps at once—a refusal to drive out the Canaanites, and this followed by a decision to sit down and dwell among them. "*Canaanites, Hittites,*" etc.—not ethnological but geographical names, say many. The inhabitants of Canaan were a congeries of various races, who adopted a common Semitic language, and were attracted to the country by the commercial facilities of the sea-coast, the fertility of its soil, and the strength of its mountain fastnesses. The word "Canaanite" signifies *lowlander;*" Amorite," *highlander;* "Perizzite," *dweller in the open country;* "Hivite," *dweller in villages,* as described above; "Jebusite," *a thresher;* "Hittites," *the posterity of Heth,* in the mountainous country of Judah, who may have had something of the character of their father, whose name signifies, *the terrible.* [*Lias* and *Young.*]

Verse 6. And they took their daughters, etc.] Another downward step naturally following on the first two. To form connection with these wicked people by intermarrying was expressly forbidden, and solemn warnings were given to beware of striking on that rock. (Ex. xxxiv. 16; Deut. vii. 1-4; also Gen. xxiv. 3; xxvi. 34, 35; xxvii. 46; 1 Kings xvi. 31; Ezra ix. 2, 11, 12; Neh. xiii. 25-28.)

Verse 7. The actual narrative now proceeds.—Served Baalim and the groves.] (Sept. and Vulg.)Heb. *Asheroth,* not *Ashtaroth.* Not "groves" literally, but upright *wooden pillars;* for they were often cut down and burned (chap. vi. 25-30). (2 Kings xxiii. 6, 15; Deut. xii. 3). The stone pillars of Baal, on the contrary, are said to be "broken down" (Ex. xxxiv. 13; Deut. vii. 5). [*Douglas.*] Some hold that *Asherah* was a wooden image, or symbol of Astarte. [*Bertheau* and *Hengstenberg.*] (*See Notes on chap.* ii. 11-13, *p.* 32 *and* 35; also *Prof. Lias in loco.*) It has been supposed the reference is to Jupiter and Venus. [*Douglas.*] It is styled the worship of the "groves," because the "pillars" referred to were placed in the groves, and the worship was carried on there.

Verse 8. **Sold them.**] Taken from the manner of disposing of a slave; means—He gave them entirely over into his hand without any visible protection from their God (Deut. xxxii. 30; 1 Sam. xii. 9; 1 Kings xxi. 20; 2 Kings xvii. 17). "*As the Lord had said*" (Lev. xxvi.; Deut. xxviii. 29). "Worthy are they to serve those, whose false gods they have served." [*Hall.*] "*And they served*," if not formally as vassals and slaves, yet the service must have been a virtual bondage—such cruel treatment as the caprice of a heathen tyrant might dictate. The Hebrew word יַעַבְדוּ implies a worse servitude than being tributary, though that is included.

"*Chushan-rishathaim*"—"Chushan of double wickedness." The *Targum* and *Peshito* interpret it to mean, "*the crime-committing Chushan*." The former calls him—"Chushan the wicked, king of Syria on the Euphrates." *Rawlinson* regards him as a powerful king, who is represented on the Assyrian inscriptions as the subduer of rebellious countries. *Cush* is a general name for a widely-diffused family of nations, and is descriptive of their general characteristics, their mode of life, their darkness of complexion, etc. Kings and heroes beyond the Euphrates are named כּוּשָׁן. Probably the first part of the name is ethnological in its reference. Cush was the son of Ham, and the father of Nimrod, and so his name may have been taken by the whole line of warlike heroes who followed each other on the banks of the Euphrates, somewhat in the same manner as the Sultans of Turkey, who formed an almost unbroken line of men of energy and enterprise for a long period. In that case, Chushan would be a mere titular or honorary designation. The latter name may have been given to express the detestation in which he was held as the enslaver of the nations. It would imply a similar odium to that attaching to the phrase, "publicans and sinners," or it may simply mark the ferocious character of the man. It has been said, "Tyrants delight in terrible names and titles, as Attila the Hun, who styled himself "*Ira Dei et orbis vastitas*." [*Trapp.*] "*King of Mesopotamia*." Heb. *Aram-naharaim*, signifying "the Syria of the two rivers"—the Tigris and the Euphrates—or, "the highland by the two streams." He must have come a considerable distance (*Mayer* says 400 miles), which according to *Groser* made it a punishment less severe than subsequent servitudes to tribes at hand. This raid of Chushan appears to have been similar to the incursion made by the four kings from the plain of Shinar, to the country occupied by Sodom and Gomorrah, and other tribes, in the days of Abraham. (Gen. xiv.) "*Served him eight years*." The same length of time, say some, that they had openly practised idol-worship.

Verse 9. **Cried unto the Lord.**] Sad change from the days of Joshua! (Comp. chap. x. 10, 15.) "*Raised up a deliverer*." מוֹשִׁיעַ—a Helper, or Saviour. (Comp. 2 Kings xiii. 5; Neh. ix. 27.) "*Raised up*." Prompted, or stirred up. A special Divine influence was exerted on the individual. This phrase forms a striking parallel to Acts xiii. 23. "*Othniel*." The Kenizzite, the younger brother and son-in-law of Caleb, and formerly conqueror of Kirjath-sepher. (Josh. xv. 16, 17, cf. chap. i. 13.) He bore one of the most honoured names in the royal tribe, was himself a hero, and, above all, was a man who understood the science of the "wars of Canaan," viz., that all real victory is secured by *faith*. Thus he was well qualified at this critical moment to step forward and lift from the dust his country's torn standard. Othniel was not elected to office by the vote of the people, but God Himself made the choice, as He did in all the other cases.

Verse 10. **The Spirit of the Lord came upon him.**] (וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ) It is to little purpose to make much (as *Keil* does) of the distinction between the Spirit of *Elohim* and the Spirit of *Jehovah*—between the Spirit, as the principle of the *natural* life which we receive through birth, and, as the principle of the *spiritual* life which we receive through regeneration—or between the spirit of *prophecy* and the spirit of *power*, with other similar distinctions. The main thing to be noticed is, that the Divine Spirit was specially given and in an extraordinary degree, so that the recipient felt assured beyond doubt God had called him to do a great work, and was endowing him with all the gifts and qualifications that were needful for the execution of that work; whether courage, wisdom, zeal, prophecy, power, or any other quality that might be needed. The man was lifted above himself, and gifted so far as was necessary to make him an instrument entirely meet for the accomplishment of the work set before him. But it was the *supernatural* rather than the *gracious* influences that were conferred (chap. vi. 34; xi. 29; xiii. 25; xvi. 6, 9). Joshua is described as a man in whom was the Spirit (Num. xxvii. 18, see also Neh. ii. 18). "This gift, like every other, has Faith for its foundation; yet human weakness is not excluded." [*Hengstenberg*]. It was given in such measure and manner as to secure the entire efficiency of the instrument. No details are given of Othniel's mode of action. It is likely he conquered in battle. Josephus says, "he collected a band of resolute men and surprised the king's guard." The force of the phrase—"came upon him" is, *He lighted upon him*,—"*and the Lord gave Chushan into his hand*," etc., (cf. i. 2; iii. 28). The battle was not due to mere skill and courage, but the presiding mind that ordered all the circumstances and brought out the victory, was the Lord. "*His hand prevailed*"—became strong over him (chap. vi. 2). He smote him so that he was compelled to evacuate the country. "*He judged Israel*"—acted as a head to Israel—became a father to—righted what was wrong, administered justice, and decided for the nation its path of duty in the special emergency. This is the force of the word שָׁפַט. Besides taking a general charge of public affairs, "the judge" specially enforced

the law under which Israel lived, and taught the people to recognise in it the authority of Jehovah.

Verse 11. The land had rest.]—was hushed to repose, like the stormy ocean when a lull comes on in the evening, and not a ripple moves on the surface. This calm is secured by righteousness, Isa. xxxii. 17. "*And Othniel died*"—at the end of the forty years.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 5–7.

The Downward Course of Sin.

Prefatory Note. Hitherto we have seen the faithfulness of the Covenant-God in accomplishing His word to His people. From first to last, there had been no failure. All had come to pass, and the whole nation were the witnesses. They had become a great nation. They had been put in possession of one of the most beautiful homes the earth could furnish. Jehovah's right hand had done it, and done it in such a way as to leave them with a history full of thrilling interest and gratitude to all succeeding generations. No wonder that so many of their spiritual odes begin and end with a call to "*Praise the Lord.*" This is the gist of the historical portions of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.

Now in the Book of Judges, we are to read how the people fulfilled *their* side of the Covenant. Were they loyal to their God and King? Did they appreciate the high distinction conferred upon them, and did they realise the weighty obligations under which they were laid to love and serve their God, notwithstanding the temptations that might be employed to induce them to apostatise? Now that their God has done everything that He promised to do on His part, the time has come to say how they mean to fulfil what they had promised on their side. They are left entirely to themselves, without any Moses or Joshua to guide them, that they may give an unbiassed answer. They are allowed ample time—400 years and upwards—that they may have a thorough trial, and that God may bring out all that is in their hearts. Every security is taken that the verdict shall be entirely their own.

But alas! the response to all this kindness and painstaking is extremely melancholy. On every page, as we read, is stamped the word *faithless*. They erred from the beginning and they erred all through. In a single line may be epitomised all that needs be said on the subject. "*They forsook the Lord God of their fathers, and followed other gods.*" For allegiance we have treachery and alienation of heart; for alacrity in keeping the Divine commandments, we find listlessness and disobedience; for ardent gratitude we find cold indifference, and mulish insensibility; instead of lifting up a testimony for the God of their fathers, they seem totally unconscious that they have a mission in the world, and ever betray a tendency to fraternise with the devotees of heathen worship around them. Their history is a long and ever-repeating series of backslidings and punishments, of repentances and deliverances—and this throughout the entire era of the judges! What an expenditure of Divine mercy made to all appearance in vain!

In the downward course of sin related at verse 5, we mark—

I. The form of their sin.—One of *omission*. A sin of omission stands at the head of the list of the heavy charges which God brings against His people.—"*Ye have not obeyed my voice*" (chap. ii. 2). To clear the land of those wicked peoples, the last sands of whose day of forbearance were run out, was the express injunction of Jehovah, and was most imperative in its character. "*Thou shalt utterly destroy them—thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth*" (Deut. vii. 2; xx. 16, 17; also Lev. xxvii. 29). How faithfully Joshua executed

this stern commission appears from Josh. vi. 21; x. 28, 40; xi. 11, 12. The heathens themselves seemed to have a premonition that they were all doomed because of their wickedness (Josh. ix. 24, also ii. 9). Joshua had done much, but much still remained to be done; and now, after twenty years have passed away, the sad account is, that no progress has been made since that good man was laid in his grave, but on the contrary, that the work has been going back very perceptibly. Notice:—

1. **No sin of omission is ever small.** Usher's last prayer was, "O Lord! pardon all my sins—especially my sins of omission." The half-hearted king of Israel thought his sin of omission too slight to be taken account of, when he spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, among the people that were given over to entire destruction. His self-satisfied statement was, "*I have performed the commandment of the Lord.*" "*What then,*" was the stern reply—"*what meaneth this bleating of the sheep and this lowing of the oxen, that I hear?*" (1 Sam. xv. 14). Why did "*the rich man in hell lift up his eyes, being in torment*"? Because of a sin of omission! What will form the ground of condemnation of "*the goats on the left hand*" at the great day of account? Sins of omission! Why is it that millions of souls are lost that might have been saved? Because of a sin of omission—neglect of the great salvation.

Reasons why it cannot be held small:—

(1.) **It slights God's authority.** It may seem at first sight less defiant of that authority, than a sin of commission, and so some regard it as trifling. But this thought is insidious. No sin from its nature can be small. Though not a direct transgression, if it be a non-compliance with God's law, it implies a slight done to the Majesty of the Lawgiver, and a throwing off the yoke of obedience to His law.

(2.) **It implies alienation of heart from God.** Obedience is the natural expression of love. (1 John, v. 3.) But where obedience is not, there cannot be love. And as there cannot be neutrality, there must be alienation. In God's estimation, no line of demarcation is more broadly marked than that between a heart where love reigns, and one whose instinct is that of alienation. Sin, in any form, is, in the principle of it, treason against God's supremacy in the soul, and this principle once admitted, who can tell to what it may grow? Indeed, it is a sin of omission, that forms the chief ground of condemnation of the whole race of man—the want of love to God, with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind.

(3.) **There is no fear of God before the eyes.** True reverence of God implies the greatest sensibility of response to His word. It is called a "*trembling at God's word*" (Isa. lxvi. 2). It is the opposite of indifference, and implies that the soul is jealously sensitive that God should have from it all the love, obedience, and consideration that is His due. But neglect of God's law, or any of God's commands, means the opposite pole from jealous sensitiveness to give to God His due. This neglect, then, cannot be a small sin.

2. **Sins of omission may become indefinitely great.** Over the space of many years the tribes failed to fulfil a paramount duty. They lingered and doubted, they temporised and put off the disagreeble duty, and so the doomed races were not removed out of the land. On the contrary, they were allowed to recover from their panic, they gathered heart again, recovered ere long much of their lost ground, and began rapidly to multiply in numbers. And now, so far from their being exterminated, we see large cities in the interior filled with them, fertile valleys crowdedly occupied by them, and the sea-port towns in their possession along with fortresses and fastnesses all over the land. Six races out of seven count as before. What had these Israelites been doing, that there seemed scarcely to be any thinning of the numbers of the doomed nations? Rather they seem to be advancing than retreating. What a fatal issue was imminent! Had Divine Providence not interposed, the rising tide of idolatry

must soon have swelled up to the Israelitish community itself, and gradually overflowed the only true God-fearing centre among men on the earth. To such a climax must the evil effects of this sin of omission have reached, had there been no check.

Illustrations of this principle. That sins of omission grow when let alone. (*a*) *Neglect of parental training.* This goes on from day to day for years, till the result appears in evil habits contracted and evil dispositions fostered in the children, ensuring a bitter harvest of sorrow. (*b*) *Neglect of self-training.* When a man neglects day by day to fulfil his duties to his God, he becomes confirmed in the habit of living "without God," and "living to himself," the result being the growth of all manner of ungodly dispositions in the heart. It is as in a garden. If no care is taken to clear away the weeds, and turn over the soil, it will gradually become the garden of the sluggard, or, losing the character of a garden, it will become an offensive jungle, or a noisome marsh. "*I went by the field of the slothful*," etc. (Prov. xxiv. 30–32.)

II. The tendency of sin to multiply itself.

1. **No sin stands alone.** Any sin when tolerated becomes a mother sin. The appropriate name for it is "*Gad—a troop cometh.*" All history verifies this as a matter of fact. And if we look for the principle, we find it is a natural sequence that one sin should open the door for another sin. The same state of heart that can commit one sin deliberately can commit others, and many others, so long as the heart is not changed. Besides, it is part of the punishment of one sin to have the barrier broken down between the man and another sin. "*He that committeth sin becomes the servant* (*slave*) *of sin.*" The sinner is also given up to the influence of the wicked one who knows too well how to work on the bias of his sinful nature.

2. **The root sin here was failure to exterminate the Canaanites.** This was an act of direct refusal to obey a Divine command. Had they done as commanded, they would have removed the temptations and the active influences that led to other sins. But this first sin paved the way for all that came after. It led to—

3. **Their dwelling among the idolaters.** There was no alternative. Either root them out, or live among them. Kill them, or have them for snares. Being permitted to live, these idolaters became interspersed with the tribes in all corners of the land. "*The sons of God*," cultivated brotherhood with "*the children of the Wicked One.*" The professedly holy held fellowship with the unrighteous, and the openly sinful. The eyes became accustomed to look upon sin, and the ears got used to hear the voices of sin day by day, for a long period. They made a perilous peace with a sworn foe. They made the hopeless attempt of trying whether it might not be possible for "*light to hold communion with darkness.*"

4. **Their intermarrying with the ungodly.** Their sparing these nations led them to live among them, and now their living among them leads to their intermarrying with them. "*The lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh*" speedily overcame what remained of their failing fidelity. "The beauty of the Hamite women, and the secular advantages which such alliances promised, exerted a mightier influence than the counsels and the warnings of the noble men who pled the cause of God and truth, or the remembrance of past mercies and past chastisements." This was no longer walking merely on the borders of sin. It was giving it the right hand of friendship. It was taking hot coals into the bosom, and those who did so could not fail to be burned. It was allowing sin to work under the greatest possible advantages, and to work unchecked. The most powerful of all influences—those which belong to the domestic circle—are enlisted as a means to entice the soul into the commission of "the

abominable sin." Influences leading to idolatry thus came streaming in upon them through all the avenues of daily life. Rapidly a lower descent is reached.

5. **Their worship of false gods.** It is indeed all put in one sentence, as if there were no appreciable difference in time between the one step and the other. (Ver. 6.) They intermarried and "*served their gods,*" as if the two things went together as a matter of course. The spark does not more surely kindle the tinder. But so painful is the fact that the statement is made twice over, first more briefly in ver. 6, and then more explicitly in ver. 7, as if to put a melancholy emphasis on the statement. "*Yes, it was even so. The children of Israel* DID *the evil, about which so much care was taken to keep them from it—they really did forget the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves.*" Wonder, O Heavens! and be astonished O earth, etc. A flagrant breach was made of the first and greatest of all the commandments—"*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*" They were indeed casting away the very foundations of their religion as the seed of Abraham. They were formally abandoning the sacred covenant that stood between them and their God. His fear was cast off; they trampled on His laws, and cast His ordinances behind their backs. They shamelessly gave that homage to the lifeless images which was due to the true and living God.

6. **The facility with which they made the change.** Why should a whole nation, in the short space of twenty years, swing round to the opposite pole from that, to which by their remarkable history they were solemnly pledged to adhere for all coming time? It was another sad example of the fact, that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Peculiarly offensive such conduct must have been in the sight of the Jealous God. The despising of His great name—the dishonour done to His Majesty—the deep offence given to every perfection of His holy nature—were all fitted to provoke Him to anger, and to say, "Shall I not visit for these things? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" What culpable forgetfulness of all His mighty acts and gracious deliverances! What a slight put on the lavish display of loving-kindness and tender mercy! Tell it not in Tyre and Sidon lest the uncircumcised should triumph!

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 5–7.

The Unexpected Outbreak of Great Sin.

Who could have imagined that a people, exalted to heaven in point of privilege, should have so swiftly slid down the steep to the pit of heathenism? It suggests:—

I. **The latent power of sin.** Such an event could not have happened without a strong force of gravity towards evil. When temptation can lead astray with such facility there must be much affinity with it in the heart. Not more certain is the action of a spark on tinder than is the influence of evil in alluring our fallen nature to sin. In the present case, though there were no noisy demonstrations, the heart must have been secretly wedded to evil. The stream is deepest where it flows most noiselessly. Three things were remarkable—

(1.) That the depravity of the heart should have gone so far.

(2.) That it should have done so when surrounded by such sacred motives drawing in the opposite direction.

(3.) That it should have done so with so little appearance of apostasy beforehand. "*Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.*"

II. **The fostering causes of this sin—**

(1.) **Supineness.** Sloth. Men love to be at ease. The craving of flesh and blood for self-indulgence is strong. But the spiritual life requires the subordination, and even the crucifixion, of flesh and blood. Constant diligence in the use of means, and the strict fulfilment of duty are necessary, not only to promote advancement in holiness, but also to prevent backsliding into the ways of evil. There is ever a latent current of feeling in the heart downward toward ungodliness, so that the oar requires to be actively handled that the boat may ascend the stream. When the oar is laid aside, instantly there is a going downward. There is no such thing as remaining stationary. But when a difficult duty has to be performed, how many cry out like the slothful man, "There is a lion in the way—a lion in the streets."

(2.) **Neglect of watchfulness and prayer.** To "watch and pray" is the Master's own receipt for not entering into temptation. All who have overcome in spiritual battles have used this receipt, while those who have neglected to do so have sooner or later been overcome. There is much to be opposed *within*. "I am carnal, sold under sin. I find a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me." There is much to be guarded against *from without*. All that is in the world, its bewitching influences, its vain show, its pride of life, its smiles and frowns alike. And there is much of danger coming both from *within and without*. "The god of this world" is ever wielding its influences for the spiritual injury of men, and as "the spirit that works in the children of disobedience," he is ever secretly engaged in trying to seduce the heart from the ways of righteousness and truth.

(3.) **Faith dying out.** Where true faith is once fairly planted in the heart, "*He that begins the good work will carry it on*" to final accomplishment. But not a few profess to have faith who, on trial, prove to be false, and become as bad or worse than the unbeliever. In other cases true faith may exist, and yet sink so far down as to seem "ready to die," and so lead to backsliding for a time. Where faith is not in operation there is great risk of violent outbreaks of sin, for without faith there is no ground to stand on in opposing sin. It is "by faith we stand."

(4.) **Being spoiled by luxury.** When "*Jeshurun waxed fat he kicked; he forsook God that made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.*" When Israel got settled down in a rich and fertile country which he could call his own, as abundance flowed around him, he was in danger of losing that sense of dependence on his God which was so necessary to a healthy piety. Hence this is put down as one special cause of apostasy (Deut. xxxi. 20; Hos. xiii. 6; also Neh. ix. 25, 26; Deut. viii. 12–14). The well-watered plains of Jordan, which seemed like the garden of the Lord, became a curse to Sodom. Thus, too, it was with the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians. (Comp. Prov. xxx. 8, 9; Ps. lxxiii. 7, 18; Ps. xvii. 10.)

III. **The tendency of sin to seek the lowest level.** As water ever flows downwards seeking the lowest level, so does a heart that is estranged from God. It is always instinctively seeking to get farther and father away from God. "*Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod.*" Of the wicked, it is said, "*God is not in all his thoughts,*" and as this alienation grows, he begins to doubt his very existence, because he more and more wishes that no God did exist. He has a memory for everything else, but no memory for the living God.—His name, His law, and our responsibility towards Him. A godless man, who was seventy years of age, once confessed that he had never used the name of God, but twice all his life, and that was as a means of swearing.

The course of sin is ever downwards, and that with accelerating force, as the stone rolling down the mountain side, which moves faster and more

furiously at every bound. And it never stops! The sinner finds that

"In the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threatening to devour him opens wide."

But never does he reach the very lowest. It is a "*bottomless pit.*" It was hard from the first to convince the Jews that the Christ had really come. But it grew harder and harder as time went on, until it could be said of the very teachers of the nation—"*having eyes they saw not, and ears they heard not.*" None are so blind as those who will not see. "*Jesus said, For judgment am I come—that they who see might be made blind.*" There is such a condition as "*having the understanding darkened—having blindness of heart—and* (as regards the conscience) *being past feeling*"—showing an advanced growth in evil habits.

The Religious Standard not to be lowered.

This lay at the root of the apostasy. Joshua nobly put it up to the right mark (Josh. xxiv. 19, etc.). But the people with distempered vision did not see it. Already they pitched it lower while he was speaking, and the ensnaring influences of every day life led them to keep on gradually bringing it down, until they could first bear to look on evil, then to come near, and, by and bye, to embrace and practise it. When Jesus saw the multitudes following Him, He turned to them and said, "*If a man come to me and hate not his father and mother, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*"

"By presenting an easy and lax view of religion, many have been brought over nominally to the gospel, who neither knew its nature nor felt its power. Imperfect views of what Christ requires have never done any real service to the Christian cause. It is said of Philip of Macedon, that he conquered less by the sword than by his bribes. No such success is possible in spiritual warfare. We must not keep back any part of the truth—the essential depravity of our nature, the need of a radical change of heart, the necessity of dependence on the mercy of God through faith in the blood of Christ, and the requirement in all cases of a holy life. We must not tell people that every part of their progress will be free from anxiety, that their path will be uniformly smooth, that no opposition will arise without, and no struggle within. We must describe the trials as well as the comforts, the labour as well as the reward, the race as well as the prize, the battle as well as the victory. If these things are kept out of sight, there will be no real success; there may be counterfeit religion, but no vital principle of godliness. There will be no root, and therefore no 'bearing unto perfection.'" [*Foote.*].

"Nothing does so much harm to the cause of Christ as backsliding. And nothing causes so much backsliding as enlisting disciples without letting them know what they take in hand. Jesus had no desire to swell the number of His disciples by admitting soldiers who would fail in the hour of need. He bids all who think of taking service with Him, to 'count the cost' before they enter on it. People are often self deceived, and think they are converted when they are not changed at all. It costs something to be a true Christian. To be a nominal Christian and go to church is cheap and easy. But to believe in Christ with the heart, and to follow Him in life, requires much self-denial. It will cost us our sins, our self-righteousness, our ease, our wordliness. All must be given up. Christ's religion begins with a sacrifice. The cross appears at the outset." [*Ryle.*]

"If we mean to follow Christ, we must reckon on not making anything more than heaven out of our religion, as we must not think of anything less. A true disciple is one that comes after Christ, and does not prescribe to Him. He comes after him as the sheep after

the shepherd, the servant after the master, the soldier after his captain; and Christ's service will bear scrutiny. Satan shows the best and hides the worst, because his best will not countervail his worst, but Christ's will, and that exceeding abundantly."

[*Henry.*]

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verse 7.

III. The deplorable end to which their evil course led.

1. There was entire abandonment of God as their God. They were exalted to heaven with the privilege of being able to call the great Jehovah their own God. He had made to them a special gift of Himself. What a possession was this to belong to "dust and ashes!" "*Blessed were the people whose God was Jehovah.*" Yet this apostate generation did not covet the incomparable privilege. Dumb images made with men's hands they preferred to that great Being who made heaven and earth!

(1.) Sin is a great spoiler. It not only robs men of some of their valuable treasures, but it takes God Himself out of the list of their possessions! And what a loss to any man is the loss of his God! What a terrible robbery is here! To have the Divine favour withdrawn; to have the Divine image eclipsed; to be cut off from the source of all righteousness, goodness, and truth; to lose the protecting shield of Jehovah's arm; no longer to enjoy the watchful care of His loving eye; and especially to put away from them the love of His mighty heart, and the inexpressible joys of His holy fellowship—to give up all this of their own accord, is an extraordinary illustration of how far sin can go through its enchantments in stripping men of their possessions.

(2.) Sin is a great madness. When God Himself is abandoned, this madness is of the very worst type. For immortal beings to be travelling on to a never-ending Future, where the laws of righteousness and truth hold on their fixed course, yet to cast off all thought of God! To see mighty forces in nature around them now slumbering, or only partially at work, before which man is but a straw, liable to be swept away at a moment's notice, and to know that at the boundary line of the eternal state these forces will awake in all their majesty, yet still to reject the friendship and protecting care of their God! O this is deplorable indeed for those who were once children of the covenant!

2. There was sinking down to the level of heathen worship, and heathen practices. It is difficult to estimate the melancholy character of the announcement—"*they forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves.*" Through the rough discipline of the wilderness journey, the idolatrous spirit had been almost wholly purged out of the nation, and under the strict administration of Joshua "*the house had become empty, swept, and garnished.*" Now, *the unclean spirit was going and taking with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself*, and they were entering in and dwelling there, so that the latter condition of the nation was worse than it was in the beginning. *The degrading character of the new service.* The service of Baalim for the most part consisted in the perpetration of a series of acts of cruelty in honour of the god, while that of the "groves" consisted in the commission of crimes so gross as to court concealment. In both cases, crimes of unrestrained profligacy were converted by them into acts of religious worship! The practice of the most hideous forms of wickedness became their religion! The light they had was "*become darkness, and great was the darkness.*" The religious sense was for the time practically obliterated, conscience was seared, and the reins were let loose for every measure of practical wickedness. A state of life where all the grosser passions reign supreme, where the idea of responsibility for moral conduct is given up, where there is no thought of an all-seeing eye looking on, where there is no higher object to

look up to than dumb wood or stone, and where every suggestion of enlightened reason is drowned amid the wild cravings of evil affection and desire—such is the low level reached by those who had cast off their God.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verse 7.

Necessity of Separation between the Righteous and the Wicked.

1. The rule has always been clear. At the earliest dawn of history we find strict requirement made as to non-allowance of intermarriages between the godly and the ungodly, and also as to intimate intercourse of any kind. In the lines of Seth and of Cain respectively, we read of the distinction of the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men." Abraham was most strict in arranging that his promised son should not intermarry with a heathen family. It went deeply to the heart of Isaac and Rebekah that their firstborn son should have so recklessly violated this rule. It was a solemn injunction to the nation of Israel to keep themselves entirely aloof from intimate fellowship with other nations. Especially, an emphatic charge was given not to mix themselves up by marriage, or other ties, with the nations that occupied the land of their inheritance. Any violation of this charge was found at all times to lead to disastrous consequences. So it is said, "*Israel shall dwell safely, being alone.*"

2. Its application to New Testament times. The principle is laid down that Christians should not form intimate relations with the men of this world. They are not to make close companions of them, even when they are led in the course of their calling to do business with them (1 Cor. v. 9–11).

They are not to entangle themselves in intimate unions with the openly wicked and profane. This is but to follow up the prayer—"*lead us not into temptation.*" It is to obey the injunction, "*be not unequally yoked with unbelievers,*" etc. And again, "*Come out from among them, and be ye separate.*" And it is to act in the spirit of the maxim, "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

"In unequal matches, the bad are more likely to corrupt the good than the good to reform the bad." [*Henry.*]

3. The line of separation. The righteous are not to associate with the men of this world in any of their evil principles or corrupt practices. They are not to act with them while giving way to sinful indulgences, or to arts and acts of dishonesty, deception and fraud, or any conduct whatever which the word of God condemns. But there is a field of action and of thought which the Christian has in common with the man of the world, such as professional duties and engagements, commercial transactions, scientific pursuits, and also the ties of relationship, or trade, or neighbourhood; also benevolent and philanthropic schemes, the rights and duties of citizenship, etc. In regard to these, some measure of intercourse is allowed, if care is taken not to compromise Christian principle.

4. Care must be taken to draw the line. The friends of God, and the friends of sin, if sometimes accidentally brought together, must never become bosom friends. Christians are the holy temple of God, and must not get polluted by contact with transgressors. The intercourse of evil men is very apt to corrupt the hearts of Christians. By the secret influence of their words, looks, and conversation, they do so. We come to have less horror at vice, as we accustom our eyes to look at it from day to day; we feel less alarm while we hear of it frequently; and we gradually get less cautious and circumspect while we constantly mix with the gay, the worldly, and the men of corrupt minds. Even the Old Dispensation could teach that we should "not plough with an ox and an ass together," *i.e.*, with a clean and

an unclean animal in the same yoke. So now under the New Economy righteousness should not have fellowship with unrighteousness, nor should light have communion with darkness. (See *Barnes* on 2 Cor. vi. 14–18; also on 1 Cor. xv. 33.)

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 5, 6.

The Inevitable Issue of Sin.

I. Their experience of a course of sin.

1. It begins with high promises. Its nature is to work by allurement. It glitters and it flatters; it smiles and it enchants; it deceives and it intoxicates. It promises immediate gratification, and that of the richest kind. Its golden apples are easily plucked, and they are to be had at once without the trouble of waiting for them. Its enjoyments are lip-full in measure—all that is agreeable to flesh and blood, all that the "carnal" heart can desire. An air of fascination is thrown around every object, and all things are made to appear "*couleur de rose.*" Bright flowers are presented to draw the eye, sweet odours to regale the sense of smell, rich harmonies to ravish the ear, and choice delicacies to please the taste. Whatever witchery can be practised on the senses, whatever seductive arts can be employed to win the affections, whatever lulling influences might possibly succeed in soothing the conscience, whatever persuasive power can be brought to bear on the will, all is employed with the skill of a magician to draw the soul across the line of rectitude into the region of transgression. A certain nameless influence is felt to be drawing the soul onward, more difficult to analyse than the ozone of the atmosphere around us.

The Israelites thought they had got a happy solution of their difficulties when they closed hands in cordial alliance with these Canaanites, agreed to live with them as good neighbours, and employed the sacredness of the marriage tie to cement their relations in a lasting peace. Thus would they be saved from carrying out farther the dangerous and murderous work of extermination. Thus the brightest commercial prospects were opened to them, and the full cup of life's enchanting pleasures, which these nations were accustomed to put to their lip, would also be shared by them. The argument was irresistibly plausible, and they allowed themselves to be beguiled. But one thing it lacked. It was against the express command of their God! And so—

2 Sin soon proves a peace disturber. When the soul is first enticed all things are at peace. There is no thunder in the sky, nor even a single black cloud. The sun shines brightly overhead. The air is balmy and genial. The flowers bloom freshly and sweetly around us, the lawn is verdant, the birds sing among the branches, and all nature by her profoundly peaceful attitude seems to second or support the argument of sin by her tacit approval. The tempted one is thus induced to put forth his hand, and pluck the forbidden fruit. From that moment the wheels begin to move backward. No abrupt external change takes place. The sun still shines, and the birds still sing. But presently a snake appears in the grass. Ere long the flowers droop and the leaves wither. Thistles and tangled brakes begin to appear. The path becomes rugged, and the wildness of the desert replaces the culture of the garden. A black cloud gathers in the heavens, and instead of the warm soft zephyrs, cold moaning winds begin to be heard. At last come the thunder clouds, and the forked lightnings, with the tempest and the hail—too sure evidence as to what is the legitimate issue of sin.

"*There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*" Israel's peace was gone from the day that they openly threw off the authority of Jehovah, and of set

purpose gave themselves up to the worship of idols. Their history from that point became a series of painful surprises and crushing calamities. Instead of being a perpetual summer, their history more resembled a succession of desolating winters, with intervals of not very genial spring seasons between. The high name which the fathers had won in the conquest of the land did not secure to their successors undisturbed repose, whether they continued faithful or not. Sin, true to its antecedents, leads to trouble. From near and far the dangers come. Sometimes one king, sometimes another; in all directions messengers are found to execute the threatened judgments. Israel is not at rest in the land of rest. That which should have been a land of peace is turned into a sea of troubles.

3. **Sin is an essential weakness.** "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." The mighty people before whom the armies of more than thirty kings were hopelessly discomfited now quail and turn their backs at the appearance of a single chief and his trained followers. They were utterly unable to make head against the invader. Chushan walked the course. "*Their men of might did not find their hands.*" "*Their defence was departed from them.*"

The one cause of their weakness was, that *through their sin God had become their enemy.* This was not merely one cause among others, but it was the only cause. For though many instrumentalities may be at work to punish the guilty, one Sovereign Will controls and guides the whole.

(*a*) *A man's own conscience* is turned against him, and he cries out "*My punishment is greater than I can bear!*" Imaginary terrors make him afraid. "Each bush he takes to be an officer." "*Terrors take hold on him as waters,*" and he fleeth from his own shadow. It was an evil time in the history of Israel, when they had a man with a guilty conscience for a king, when his army was scattered, and his few friends followed him trembling. But among the few was one man with a good conscience, before whom and his armour-bearer ten thousand were put to flight.

(*b*) *God can bring adversity against him on every side.* Every scheme which the wicked man attempts, God can make to fail. He can set His face against him on every side, so that all things shall work together for his injury and not for his profit. As in the case of Pharaoh's chariots and horses, He can take off the chariot wheels, so that they shall drive them heavily in endeavouring to carry out their purposes. "*Evil shall slay the wicked.*"

(*c*) *There is no escape from this misery.* God can shut him in on all sides. When God sendeth trouble, who can give quietness? He can arm all the creatures against him, for they are ever ready to avenge the quarrel of their Creator. "*If the man should flee from a lion, He can cause a bear to meet him; or if he goes into his house, and leans his hand on the wall, He can cause a serpent to bite him.*" If he should "*should flee from the iron weapon, the bow of steel shall strike him through.*"

4. **Sin is a great humiliation** This is what it always comes to in the end, though it may reach it in different ways. It was a sad change for Israel from the days of Joshua! The invincible army that fought under that noble captain, before whom all the kings of the Amorites, with their mighty hosts, melted like water, had now fallen so low that they were unable to stand against one king and his army, but become an easy prey to a stranger from the far North-East. "*How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!*" We see the people for whom the Lord burst the fetters of an Egyptian bondage now bowing their necks to the yoke of a foreign prince. "*Their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up.*" Those who went on "conquering and to conquer" were not only arrested in their course, but reduced to a condition of slavery, under the iron foot of a rough despot from an unknown land. How

galling to those who were accustomed to the air of liberty, thus to be trodden upon as the mire!

II. **The preliminaries of punishment.** The tale of Israel's history is exceedingly abbreviated, yet it is given so compactly that much lies on the surface and much more may be picked up without hard searching. There are certain instructive preliminaries which may be so gathered, thus:—

1. **The grounds of punishment are clearly stated before it is inflicted.** Not a drop of the thunder shower falls till it be fully proved that such a step is necessary. Before proceeding to send forth His judgments, God is careful first of all to vindicate His own character in adopting such a course of action. He will make it clear that, in the government of the world, no doing of His shall lead fairly to the conclusion, that He sometimes takes delight in sending out His arrows merely to show His power, though no provocation be given. He cannot lose His great name as a God—"*slow to wrath, rich in mercy, who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and whose tender mercies are over all His works*"—in dealing with men on the earth. (Ezek. xviii. 23, 32, chap. xxxiii. 11; Lam. iii. 33; Ps. lxxxvi. 15, ciii. 8, etc.; 1 Tim. ii. 4; 2 Pet. iii. 9.)

Hence, before a single speck appears in the sky to indicate the approach of a storm, a whole chapter is taken up with a careful explanation of the grounds of the Divine procedure (chap. ii), that "the Judge of all the earth" may "be justified when He speaks and clear when He judges." Far more importance is attached to that in the general account given, than in the gathering or dispelling of the successive storms that broke over them. The capital charge urged against them is, that *they forsook Jehovah, and went after other gods.* This is fixed upon as the root evil—the one springhead from which all the streams of their evil practices flowed. They, as a people, had read backward the very first commandment of their sacred law; and their conduct is repeatedly and emphatically condemned (chap. ii. vers. 2, 11, 12, 13, 17, 19; iii. 5, 6, 7). There was reason enough in this one capital sin for all the rigorous dealing that follows throughout this book.

2. **God waits long before He sends His judgments.** The work of wrath is not that in which He delights. Had it been so, the terrible calamity recorded in verse 8 would have fallen much earlier. Yet a full generation has passed away since the last convocation, presided over by Joshua (chap. ii. 10). At the date of that meeting, symptoms of the cancer of idolatry had began to appear (Joshua xxiv. 23), notwithstanding the apparent earnestness with which the oath of fidelity was taken. Insidiously, but surely, that cancer kept working its way for some 30 or 40 years, until now "*the whole head had become sick, and the whole heart faint, and from the sole of the foot, to the crown of the head, there was no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores.*"

(*a*) *God waited at every stage.* When they showed so little heart in driving out the Canaanites, it was forseen that that would lead to fuller-fledged evils, yet their God waits to allow them a fair opportunity of shaking off their indulgence and "doing the first works." When again they sat down among the Canaanites, and accepted them as neighbours, He still waited that it might be seen, whether there might not be several persons of a Lot-like spirit among them, who, with all his worldliness, still felt his "*righteous soul vexed among them from day to day with their unlawful deeds.*" And even when they went the length of intermarrying and so becoming amalgamated with these ungodly races, God waited to see whether they would not take alarm at the length of their own wickedness, and, shrinking back from the frightful precipice before them, would adopt the course of speedy and thorough repentance. Not till they had reached the climax of their evil course, and were actually mingling with all the abominations of Baalim and the groves, did God proceed to pour upon them the vials of His wrath.

(b) This waiting was in harmony with other occasions. It was not a solitary, nor even a rare case. Ten generations from Adam were allowed to pass, during which men's sins were accumulating more and more, ere the old world was destroyed by a deluge. In like manner, ten generations from Noah were numbered, ere the fires of heaven came down on the towers of Sodom. What patience was exercised with the Canaanites! Though they had long sinned before Abraham sojourned among them, yet 400 years more must elapse ere the cup of their iniquity should be filled. Even Jerusalem, though so ripe in wickedness, that it could crucify the Lord of Glory on a tree of shame, has yet, after such an act, forty years of pause given to it, that it might "*look to Him whom it had pierced and learn to mourn.*" His character is to be "long-suffering" and "slow to wrath." He does not proceed at once to punish, so soon as a case is made out, but He "waits to be gracious." When men's sins begin to cry out against them, He stops His ears for a time that He may not hear them. His sword hangs long in the scabbard, before it is drawn. He does not fly in the sinner's face at his first provocation. The Jews were accustomed to say, that "Michael, the minister of justice flies with but one wing" and therefore slowly, whereas "Gabriel, the minister of mercy flies with two wings," and therefore very swiftly.

3. God warns before He strikes. While the people were going on sinning, and advancing from bad to worse, the Angel-Jehovah, who had redeemed them from all evil hitherto, appears before them at Bochim, chides them severely for the past, and utters a solemn warning for the future. The marking out of so many nations for the purpose of testing and chastising them, was also a most expressive warning given of a coming catastrophe. Not more so was the building of the ark from day to day for so long a time, in the days of Noah. He publishes His anger long before He executes it, and when He does punish, it is in the manner and measure that He had threatened (chap. ii. 15; Hos. vii. 12).

Examples. The old world was warned by *Enoch* (Jude 14); by *Methusalah* (whose name, *Bush* says, signifies "he dies and it is sent out"—prophetic of the deluge, which happened in the year when he died); by *Lamech*, who had his eyes open to the coming calamity (Gen. v. 29); and by *Noah*, the venerable "preacher of righteousness." The famine in Egypt was foretold by Joseph. Repeated warnings were given to Pharaoh as to what would happen to him and his people, so long as he refused to let Israel go. The captivity of the ten tribes was predicted by Hosea and other prophets, and many expostulations were used. The overrunning flood of the Babylonian army, and the capture of the sacred city with the massacre of the inhabitants, were all announced beforehand by Jeremiah and others, and warning given that it was for long continued rejection of their God. There is, indeed, scarcely an instance of the infliction of the Divine judgments recorded in Bible history, which is not preceded by suitable warning given beforehand.

4. There is a climax in the Divine forbearance. Up to a certain point, He acts as if He saw not. Perhaps for a considerable time the thunders of heaven sleep, and the transgressors are not consumed. The wicked interpret this forbearance to mean that there is little harm in their conduct, or that God does not see, and will not require. "*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is set in them to do evil.*" This misinterpretation usually is not allowed to continue long. "These things thou hast done, and I kept silence; thou didst think I was such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes" (Ps. l. 21, 22). Though God does not punish sin as soon as committed, we dare not suppose that He is at any moment indifferent to it, or that any act of sin separately, as well as a course of sin, fails to excite His intense opposition to it. It is the yearnings of mercy in the Divine bosom that lead to the sparing of the

sinner for a time, that means and opportunities may be granted for repentance, and not because the Divine anger does not burn against every transgression.

(*a*) *The object of the silence.* After sin is committed, there is a waiting for a longer or shorter period to show that God does not desire the death of the sinner, but is on the contrary intensely willing to save him. Hence the period of inactivity or forbearance which takes place between the date of entering on a sinful course, and the hour when retribution falls. That interval is filled up with calls, remonstrances, and arguments of all kinds to induce repentance. But

(*b*) *All the while God's anger burns against every sin in the series.* When the object of the silence has been gained and there is no repentance, then the laws of righteousness must hold on their natural course, and the Divine anger, which has really existed all the time against the sins committed, must have its due display. However deep the Divine wish that the sinner should not perish, when that has been clearly established, regard must also be had to God's great jealousy for the holiness of His character, and for the sacred order and purity of His moral government. Hence there is a limit to forbearance. A purpose is gained by it for a time, and another purpose, equally high and sacred, is gained by ceasing to forbear after a time.

(*c*) *When forbearance ceases, it is not merely on account of the heinous nature of the last sin committed.* That sin may be less criminal than many that preceded it, but it marks out the limit which Wisdom has determined for the display of mercy, and therefore doom comes with it. Regard is had to the whole series of sins in the list, for "*God requireth that which is past.*" The whole category of evil deeds, and the cloud of evil thoughts, are together before His eye. For nothing is forgotten till forgiven, and there is no forgiveness till there is penitence. It must ever be remembered that God looks to the whole of a man's life when making a reckoning with him, and not merely to particular sins, however culpable these may be. "*They consider not that I remember all their wickedness.*" "*God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing.*"

Illustrations.—Prov. xxix. 1; Ps. vii. 11–13; Rom. ii. 5; Matt. xxiii. 35, 36; 2 Kings xvii.; 2 Chr. xxxvi.

Cases of *Ahab* and *Jezebel*; *Pharaoh*; the three *Herods*; *Hophni* and *Phinehas*; king *Saul*; *Ahaz*, etc.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 7, 8.

A Special Brand put on Root Sins.

Those sins which form the roots of other sins receive a special mark of condemnation on every page of Scripture. Each of these sins is like a upas tree that distils its poisonous influence on every side, and like the banyan tree it spreads itself in all directions.

1 Idolatry is a root sin, and is pointed out in these chapters as the all comprehensive sin of the people of God. Three times over in as many successive verses (Chap. ii. 11, 12, 13) is this set forth as the leading and terrible iniquity of the people whom God brought out of Egypt. And all down the page it is condemned in the most pointed and solemn manner as implying in itself the very essence of depravity, and as giving birth to all manner of corrupt practices in the life. It was in its nature an apostasy from God—a forsaking the living and true God, and a violation of innumerable sacred obligations to love and serve Him; but it was also a giving that supreme place in the heart, which belonged to Him alone, to other objects the creatures oftentimes of their own impure imaginations and sinful desires. The restraints of sin were

thus set loose, for the objects of their fealty and homage were in reality creations of their own wicked hearts. They imparted to their gods such qualities as would permit the gratification of their own evil desires, and so not only did they sin without let or hindrance, but their very religion was made up of the indulgence of those "lusts and passions which war against the soul." What a long list of flagrant crimes and corrupt practices would be given, were that short statement expanded to specify all the details—"*they served Baalim and the groves!*"

Idolatry was thus a root sin. It led to multitudes of other sins, and it was the national "easily—besetting sin." The most careful precautions were taken against it, and the most solemn utterances were made in denouncing its evil character. The very first precept in the Decalogue formally brands it. The second precept details the dreadful insult it offers to the glory of the Jealous God. By all the prophets throughout their history, God warned the people against it saying—"*O do not this abominable thing which I hate!*" The very spots where this sin was practised were to be destroyed and purged with fire (Deut. xii. 1–3). The sacrifice of little children either by immolation, or causing them to pass through the fire, was a frequent practice under this wicked system, and roused the Divine anger (Deut. xii. 29–32; Ezek. xvi. 20, 21). All that might entice to idolatry, whether false prophets, brother, son, daughter, wife, or bosom friend, were on no account to be spared, but summarily to be stoned to death. (Deut. xiii. 1–5 and 6–11 also 12–17).

But indeed there is scarcely a page which treats of the history of God's Israel that does not single out this sin for emphatic denunciation as being the prolific source of many practical evils. The Book of "Deuteronomy" is full of warning against temptation to it. "Judges" records the sad issues to which its commission led The same thing is bewailed meditatively in many parts of the Book of "Psalms." "Isaiah" strikes the key-note of severe condemnation in his second chapter. "Jeremiah" does the same at chap. ii. 13. While "Ezekiel" and "Hosea" throughout give melancholy pictures of the awful guilt contracted through idolatrous practices.

2. **Unbelief, showing itself by disobedience**, is another root sin which is severely condemned here. Unbelief itself is not expressly mentioned, because in a historical account it is more suitable to speak of *deeds done* in the conduct than of *principles at work* in the heart. But disobedience in the life had unbelief for its root in the heart And unbelief again has for its root the alienation of the heart from God. For this sin the whole congregation that left Egypt perished in the wilderness—for "they could not enter in because of unbelief." (Heb. iii. 8–19; Ps. xcv. 8–11). For the same reason here the Israelites could not drive out the Canaanites. Chap. i. 19–36; Chap. ii. 2. They could not do it, because they would not in faith go through with it. There was much latent disobedience; and on this the reproving angel puts his finger in the last quoted verse. "They would not hearken"—"they turned quickly out of the way"—"they did not obey the commandments of the Lord"—"they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way." All this is repeated again and again, and given as the ground of the terrible chastisement which followed.

This corresponds with the whole account given of unbelief throughout Scripture. It was by an act of unbelief or disobedience that man fell and lost all his earthly happiness. It is also by an act of unbelief that millions on millions lose heavenly happiness after having had a full offer of all the blessings of the great salvation. It is a root sin, as it lies at the root of all the disobedience to the Divine commandments which prevails in the world. The "works" on account of which the wicked shall be condemned on the day of account, all proceed from unbelief as their cause.

3. All other root sins are singled out for special reprobation. It is so with *Pride*, which is the cause of a whole brood of sins in practical life—jealousies, envies, evil speakings, hatreds, strifes, and all manner of offences against our neighbour, as also almost every sin that can be named against God. *Selfishness* also may be so reckoned, as it strikes against the golden rule, and saps the foundation of the fulfilment of all the duties we owe to our neighbour. We put down *Covetousness* in this list, for we are told that the "love of money is the root of all evil." *Lying* also stands at the head of a long catalogue of crimes; and *Deceit—Ambition—Ingratitude*, with many others might be mentioned—all of which fall under a special condemnation as being the sources whence many other sins proceed.

SIN SURE TO FIND US OUT.

These children of the covenant were now sitting at ease in the land of their inheritance, and supposing, notwithstanding their neglect of Divine commands, that they would never more see trouble, that they would "die in their nest, and multiply their days as the sand." But their "*condemnation slumbered not.*" Sin has a cry, and that cry came up before God, calling for a reckoning.

"It often happens, that a man who has committed a crime takes his place secretly in a railway train, and is swiftly whirled away to the sea coast. But fast as he travels, there is something travelling faster, namely, the message along the telegraph wires; and when he hurries out at the distant terminus he is instantly grasped by officers of justice, who have been long in waiting. So God often meets startled sinners, who have been vainly trying to escape His notice and retribution.

There was a man who committed a foul murder in a Scottish castle on a young bridegroom, at whose marriage festivities he had hypocritically assisted. The assassin took horse in the dead of night, and fled for his life through wood and winding path. When the day dawned, he slackened his pace, and behold! he was emerging from a thicket in front of the very castle whence he had fled, and to which by tortuous paths, he had unconsciously returned. Horror seized him; he was discovered, and condemned to death. *So however far and fast we may fly, we shall find ourselves, when light returns, ever in presence of our sin, and of our Judge.*" [*Biblical Treasury.*]

"A minister, preaching from the text, 'be sure your sin will find you out,' said, 'If *you* do not find out your sin, and bring it to Calvary to get it pardoned through the blood of Jesus, your sin will find you out, and bring you to the judgment seat, to be condemned and made the object of God's righteous displeasure. A young woman who had told a lie before she heard the sermon, thought within herself 'Oh that lie! I must either find it and bring it to Calvary, or it will find me out at the great day.' She was alarmed; the thought pursued her, till at length she was led to Jesus, and knew the joy of being forgiven."

[*Biblical Treasury.*]

"We need a monitor to remind us that sin calls for a reckoning. A magician once presented a ring to his prince. This ring was valuable, not for the diamonds and rubies that gemmed it, but for a rare and mystic property in the metal. In ordinary circumstances it sat easily enough, but so soon as its wearer formed a bad thought, or wish, or designed a bad action, the ring became a monitor. Suddenly contracting, it pressed painfully on the finger, warning him of sin. That ring is conscience—the voice of God within us, the law written on men's hearts, according to the scripture statement, 'their conscience also beareth witness, and their thoughts the mean while accuse or excuse one another.'" [*Guthrie.*]

The Danger of Leaving One Known Sin Unconquered.

"Sin is like 'a serpent by the way—(Gen. xlix. 17) an adder in the path.' The reference in this scripture is to a very poisonous kind of viper with horns. It moves with great rapidity in all directions, forwards, backwards, and sideways. When he wishes to surprise one at a distance from him, he creeps with his side towards the person, his head averted, till measuring the distance he turns round and springs upon him. Sometimes he will lie in hiding for hours, till some one come within reach, when, watching his opportunity he will spring a distance of some feet to bite his hand or foot. He is called by the Orientals 'the lier in wait.' Pliny says it hides its whole body in the sands, leaving only its horns exposed, which being like grains of barley in appearance, attract birds within its reach, so as to become an easy prey." [*Russell's Palestine.*]

Sin is such a viper—stealthy in approach, and deadly in nature. So the Israelites found it to be, when they were allured by the hope of gain and other attractions to enter into league with the Canaanites. It was the one sin of sparing these wicked, which by degrees brought Israel to the frightful pass of becoming open and systematic idol-worshippers and practisers of all the abominations of the groves.

"*Not a Canaanite was to be suffered to breathe.* The taint of idolatry seemed to infect the very air of the defiled land; contamination breathed from the trees of its groves. If God were desirous of letting the whole human race drift away from Him into hopeless darkness, and to stultify all His promises, no surer plan for effecting these ends could have been taken than that of sparing this people. The Israelites had not pushed their conquest back into the fortresses and fastnesses of the hills, and in these were growing up and under training fresh troops of young warriors.

"*So one unconquered sin often becomes a thorn in the side.* We are not careful to make war on our sins in their fastnesses and breeding places—in the lurking places of thought and of our habitual tone. We do not believe that happy is he who dasheth the little ones against the stones. We do not grapple with and put an end to the young things that grow up to be strong and subduing sins. The result is that they become thorns in our sides. We may try to wear the thorn under our garment, and go about smiling as if there were not terrible havoc being made of our peace with God; we may wear it as the ascetic wears his spiked girdle under his frock; but it is there reminding us by pain and misery of our slackness in cleansing our life. One sin thus overlooked cleaves to us and makes itself felt—not a day passes but something occurs to give it occasion; it is a 'thorn in the flesh' cleaving to us in all companies, and at all times. Like a cruel foe, it sweeps off our best harvests. When we have made a goodly effort, and offered earnest prayer for a time, so that we seemed to bear fruit, the old sin comes in to cheat us of the fruit of long-continued exertion, and puts us back to the lowest point in the spiritual life. The whole weary work has to be begun afresh; as a land exposed to perpetual invasion, our life is left fruitless, and we have to go through again the same routine of ploughing and sowing." [*Dods.*]

The vital point is not to break down the wall of opposition to sin at all. For it is much easier to avoid committing the first sin than, having been once guilty, to avoid going on to a course of sin.

Presumptuous sins are especially to be avoided, as being most provocative to God, and most perilous to ourselves.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verse 8.

III. The character of God's punishments for sin.

1. **They are inflicted with a weighty hand.** The downcoming of that rough king from the region of "the two rivers" was, as if "the boar out of the forest" had been let loose on the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts, breaking down its hedges, and wasting it at pleasure. It was a sign that "the anger of the Lord had waxed hot against Israel." When God proceeds to punish, it is done in a manner worthy of His own greatness. His great name must be vindicated. The weight of the infliction must correspond with the majesty of Him who sends it—whose law has been violated, and whose authority must be upheld. God is to be feared in His judgments (Ps. lxxvi. 7). It must be seen, as by a flash amid the darkness, that power is really on the side of righteousness, and that sin has a terrible odds to contend with under the government of a holy God. It must also be left in no doubt, that, notwithstanding the greatness of His mercy, God cannot deal with sin as a trifling matter in the exercise of His moral government of the world; nor can He permit men to regard it as a thing which lightly touches their interests, and which a few tears can at any moment wash out.

(1.) **Yet the weight of the infliction is great only according to a man's estimate.** It is never absolute. That is not needed, to produce on the minds of creatures a suitable conception of Jehovah's majesty, and His jealousy for the spotless purity of His character. To do this, the mere putting forth of His finger will suffice. "The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at His reproof." Many similar wonders take place at His bidding. Yet all this we are told is "but the whisper of Him; the thunder of His power who can comprehend?" (קְצוֹת—*borders, skirts,* or *extremities,* as compared with the full body, or entire dimensions, Job. xxvi. 14). In anguish of spirit, the afflicted patriarch exclaims, that the mere *touch* of God's hand had made him a spectacle of commiseration to all around him (Job xix. 21). What then must have been the effect of the *blow* of His arm! Nay, he says again, "*thine eyes are upon me, and I am not*" (Job vii. 8). David cries in distress, "*Remove thy stroke, for I am consumed with the blow of thine hand*" (Ps. xxxix. 10). When punishing His people in the wilderness, we are told, that "*God did not stir up all His wrath, for He remembered they were but flesh, a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again*" (Ps. lxxviii. 38, 39). At other times language is used, intimating that God puts forth the greatness of his power in sending out His judgments, *i.e.*, at man's point of view it seems so. In speaking of the destruction of Pharaoh, and the redemption of the people, these are said to be done with a "strong hand, and a stretched out arm." And when vengeance is taken on the Philistines for daring to profane God's sacred ark, we are told, "*the hand of the Lord was heavy on them of Ashdod, and it was very heavy on the men of Ekron*" (1 Sam. v. 6, 11). Also, when individual afflictions are felt to be severe, God's hand is said to be "mighty." "*Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God,*" etc. (1 Pet. v. 6). It is clear that in all these cases, the weight of God's hand is measured by the relative strength of man to bear it. What is to God insignificant, is to man overwhelming.

(2.) **The measure of the infliction is determined by what will suffice to prostrate the soul before its God.** Sometimes a mere touch of the rod will suffice to do this, as in the case of the good Hezekiah when he turned sick, and was threatened with death; that pious man was at once led to penitential tears and earnest prayers. A simple look will even suffice, as when "*the Lord turned and looked upon Peter, he went out and wept bitterly.*" But in dealing with incorrigible sinners, the rod must be grasped with a firmer hand. Emphatic

evidence must be furnished, that the righteous Governor of the world "can by no means clear the guilty." And, in the case of His own people, He will, if necessary, go the length of seeming to violate His holy covenant, and reject the people whom He had chosen rather than not subdue their rebellious spirit, lead them to genuine sorrow for sin, to unreserved confession, and a spirit of new obedience in the life.

(3.) **The weight of Israel's first great trial.** The stroke was heavy. They are "*delivered up into the hands of men*," and if "the greatest enemy of man be man," their prospects at this moment might well be regarded with dismay. For the name of the agent employed to execute the purpose of the Divine anger —"*Chushan of double wickedness*"—whatever its precise import, was sufficiently prophetic of dark days and doleful nights, which they would have to spend for an unknown length of time in the iron grip of that unpitying monster. The sentence was—to be given up for an indefinite time, to become the victim of the wild caprices of this lawless freebooter, who was already the terror of all the East. In this man's hands they were placed helplessly. That is the force of the expression, "*the Lord sold them into his hand.*" He who owned them gave them entirely over into his possession for a time, that he might gratify upon them all the savage instincts of his brutal nature, maltreating them as the veriest chattels, and wantonly treading them down as the mire of the streets. It was truly a sentence of "penal servitude." The expression "*they served*" meant much more than that they *paid tribute*. Where "might was right," and moral principle was unknown, justice and humanity would alike be cast to the winds. Where barbarism and lust of power reigned unchecked, appeals against cruelty of dealing might as well have been addressed to tigers and hyenas, as to men accustomed to deeds of brutality and of torture. The condition must have been pitiable indeed, implying perpetual exposure to all manner of indignities shown and acts of injustice done, merciless treatment both for individuals and for families, the young and the old, as well as the active and the strong—a condition of grinding oppression, and of virtual, if not of literal slavery. "Their crops for which they toiled would be eaten by another; their goodly houses tenanted by their foes, and themselves turned into the street; their wives and daughters made bondwomen, and their sons made slaves; their national glory turned to shame, and their fondly-cherished hopes withered into despair."

The bitterness of their distress may be judged from the fact, that a deep cry of anguish rose from every household all over the land, similar to that which was wrung from the groaning multitude in the brickfields of Egypt in the days of their fathers, during the ever-memorable bondage. For the same word is used here as in Exod. ii. 23—וַיִּזְעֲקוּ—an utterance of great distress—shouting aloud for help—as the cry of children to their father when some ferocious animal is upon them. The same word is used in Jer. xi. 11, meaning—"however bitterly and earnestly they cry, I will not hearken." For years they thus cried, until eight years were accomplished! Who can tell how much unwritten history is implied in this short statement! A history of robberies, murders, and bonds—of groanings under heavy exactions levied, and savage blows inflicted—of sighs breaking on the midnight air, and sleepless pillows bedewed with tears—of frantic shrieks raised to heaven for help, on the one side, and "souls weeping in secret places" on the other—A history of breaking hearts, and bruised limbs—of backs giving way under their burdens, and spirits fainting within from the extinction of hope—of loud but vain appeals to deaf ears, and steeled hearts—of spasmodic but fruitless efforts on the part of the feeble, to resist the ferocities of the strong —In one word, a history of tragic tales of desolated hearths, and heavy records of grief written over many a once happy home; while oppressions, cruelties, and wrongs, like a Marah sea were rolling all over the land. The dark prince of the house of Ham realised to the full his notorious character of "double wickedness,"

in the double destruction which he dealt out to the descendants of the house of Shem, when a mysterious Providence granted him permission.

2. They are calmly inflicted. The statement in ver. 8 seems to indicate, that the rod was used with great excitement of feeling. It is said, "*the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel.*" But this mode of speaking is used expressly in accommodation to men's conceptions of God's ways of acting. No such thing as agitation of feeling, far less tumultuous or passionate excitement, can ever consist with the real character of the King Eternal. In the Divine bosom there reigns, and ever must reign, an everlasting calm. Filling immensity with His presence; maintaining absolute control over all beings as His creatures, and over all events as possible to happen only by His permission; no other force being independently at work throughout the universe, but His volition—what can possibly transpire to excite any violent emotion in the bosom of our God! His own nature being in itself an infinite Majesty, it is beneath its mark to be liable to changes of feeling, such as is the common experience of a creature nature. Man yields to the impulse of events; his bosom heaves with excitement, and he is hurried along by the current of ungovernable feelings. But loss of self-command never can be predicated of the unchangeable Jehovah. The statement in ver. 8 is, therefore, entirely the language of accommodation to human modes of thinking. God's nature being infinitely holy—being in fact the fountain head and standard of all holiness, is ever in the fixed attitude of opposition to all sin. When sin is committed, this opposition is awakened, and receives a suitable manifestation. It is however, not the opposition of a dead mechanical law, but the feeling—the abhorrence of a Personal Being; yet exercised with all the instinctive force, and undeviating regularity of a natural law. It is invariable and constant in its action, exercised with all the intelligence and emotion of a living Person, with the wise and tender consideration of a Father, and with the high unswerving principle of a Judge.

3. They are impartially inflicted. God punishes idolatrous practices when committed by His own Israel, equally as when they appear in the conduct of the heathen nations round about them. To sin, in its own essence, He is irreconcilably opposed, by whomsoever committed. Against it His wrath invariably goes forth until satisfaction is given. "He is no respecter of persons." In some respects, He hates sin more in His own people than in those who know Him not. In their case sin has peculiar aggravations. It is committed against clearer light, in the face of stronger remonstrances, in opposition to still more tender pleadings, in the abuse of peculiar privileges, and under the most sacred obligations to give an unvarying obedience. But in their case, the great fact is, that they have a "*Daysman.*" This fact, though in no degree diminishing the Divine anger against their *sin*, entirely alters the complexion of the Divine dealing with *themselves;* inasmuch as the office of the "Daysman" is to give full satisfaction for their sin, and to put them in a position in which they shall have as complete peace with God, as if they had never sinned. The idolatry of God's Israel was equally heinous, and more so than that of the heathen around them, and would not less surely have issued in their final ruin, but for the interposition of a system of sacrifice and cleansing, whereby satisfaction was given to the Throne of Eternal Righteousness. To this hope the seed of Abraham were specially called; nor were any excluded from participation in the precious privilege, who complied with the requirement of faith and repentance.

4. They are irresistibly inflicted. God's special visitations cannot be turned aside. The Israelites could not drive back this Mesopotamian king, though he was but one foe, and they had already in past times been "more than conquerors" over a whole confederacy of monarchs, who brought huge hosts against them in battle array. The mighty God of Jacob was then by their side, and all went down before them. Now He is against them and nothing prospers.

Their weapons were the same, their natural courage was up to the mark, they could bring an equal number of men into the field—yet defeat was inevitable. Their God had abandoned them.—Nay, He had specially given them over into the hands of the spoiler, and no means that could be employed, could either secure a victory, or prevent defeat. He who had "exalted their horn" in the days of their allegiance, now "defiled it in the dust." Those whom "He had lifted up," He now "casts again to the ground," and "causes men to ride over their heads." When He appears upon His throne, what is seen is like a "jasper stone"—a colour of dazzling whiteness—and a "sardine stone"—or a fiery red colour. His spotless holiness, and His great jealousy, combine to sustain His character as the All-perfect One. When He moves forward to vindicate His name, "who would set the briers and thorns against Him in battle? He would go through them, He would burn them together." "None can deliver out of His hand,"—no more than the tree can save itself from the fire.

5. They are sparingly inflicted. Less than might be expected from the grievous character of the sin committed—heinous ingratitude; the most obstinate disobedience; responding to the most earnest and affectionate pleading with hardness of heart and stubbornness of will. Sins in this world are always punished less than they deserve. The full desert of sin is reserved for the future state. The measure of punishment now inflicted, is only such as to indicate the kind of consequences which sin brings along with it, not the full amount of the penalty which it deserves. The purpose is to save the infliction of that penalty, by putting checks on sin, and showing the necessity of repentance. The infliction of the penalty is in itself a thing in which God finds no pleasure. *"As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."* The infliction of the penalty He calls His "strange act"—that which is not congenial to Him, but against His natural desires—to which He is not inclined of His own promptings, without some reason of righteousness requiring Him to proceed to such an act.

Hence God's first use of the rod with His people was lighter than it became afterwards. It was not so humbling to be subjugated by a stranger like this Chushan-rishathaim, as it was, afterwards, to come under the more galling yoke of those, whom they themselves had at one time trodden under their feet.

6. They are considerately inflicted. Wisdom, as well as love, presides over all the treatment which God gives to His people. Love prompts, and wisdom guides. No chastisement is inflicted blindly, or rashly. Every thing is considered from man's point of view, as well as from God's. There is no harsh disregard of human feelings, nor is the stern brow of the Judge seen so much, as the tender eye of the Father (Hos. xi. 3, 4, etc.). Not only is the reasonableness and the equity of the law's requirements looked at, but also the difficult surroundings amid which man is placed for obeying the law, the force of temptation with which he is beset, his infirmities, constitutional and otherwise, his weakness and ignorance, and any other element which requires to be taken into account to form a perfectly just estimate of human character and conduct. This is beautifully brought out in several touching passages in the writings of the prophets, *e.g.*, Isa. lxiii.; Hos. xi. 1–4; Zech. i. 12–17; also in several of the Psalms, such as the lxxviii.; ciii.; cv.; and cvi.

He always mixes more of mercy than of wrath in His treatment. The years of suffering are far fewer than the years of sinning which led to the suffering. "He stirred not up all His wrath," "His mercies are great," and "He afflicteth not willingly." When the end can be gained without the direct use of the rod, it is not resorted to, and after recourse is had to it, it is immediately lightened when the purpose has been served. *"I will not contend for ever, neither will I*

be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made (Isa. lvii. 16, also 17, 18)."

7. **They are inflicted in faithfulness.** The whole nation might say, as well as the individual pious man, "*I know that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.*" God's chastisements of His people are never harsh, nor even stern, but always faithful. Harshness implies disregard of our feelings, and this can never be predicated of our God. He never afflicts for the sake of afflicting, but for the purpose of serving holy and necessary ends. Sternness implies the want of tenderness; and this is never absent from the character of God, though its manifestation may be less prominent at one time than at another. It is always a Father that afflicts the people of God. But the Father is a Judge, and cannot forget what is due to Himself, both in His character and His law. Indeed, God's afflictings of His people are true to every interest concerned—true to His own glory as a jealous, sin-hating God; true to His people's well being; and true to His own word, both of threatening and promise. His anger in His chastisements is never in the strict sense vindictive, but is always exercised on the ground of righteous principle.

His chastisement of His people is—

(1.) **True to His own glory as a jealous, sin-hating God.** He must be faithful to Himself in preserving unsullied His own great name as "The Holy One of Israel"—who "is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity"—who cannot be the God of a sinful people without showing His marked displeasure with their sins, and sacredly enjoining them to "cast away their transgressions," and "become holy as He is holy;" for "His eye is only on the righteous, and His countenance beholdeth the upright."

(2.) **True to His people's well-being.**

(*a*) *Sin is a heart disease;* and every one must be made conscious of "*the plague of his own heart,*" and be directed to look for Divine help in its cure (1 Kings viii. 38).

(*b*) *Sin is a heavy burden*—too heavy for the heart to bear even now (Ps. xxxviii. 4), and sure to become greatly heavier if not removed. Bunyan, correctly makes his pilgrim say, "I fear that this burden on my back will sink me lower than the grave, and that I shall fall into Tophet." Chastisement causes the soul to realise the weight of that burden, and shows the necessity of getting one to act as a burden-bearer. Scripture intimates, that "*the Lord hath laid on Him* (*our* Substitute) *the iniquity of us all,*" and that "*Christ Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree.*"

"He seized our dreadful right, the load sustain'd,
And heaved the mountain from a guilty world."

Taught by the chastising hand, the sinner is led to say—

"I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God;
He takes them all and frees us
From the accursed load."

(*c*) *Sin is the soul's poison.* Its very nature is to destroy life, as it is the nature of fire to consume. "Sin reigns unto death." To live in sin; to commit it; even to touch it, is to die. Sinners are said, because of their course of life, to be "dead in trespasses and sins;" and, viewing it as a service, the only reward they receive for it is "death" (Eph. ii. 1; Rom. vi. 23). Means must be used to have this poison purged out of the system.

(*d*) *Sin is the soul's leprosy,* loathsome, painful, and deadly; incurable by any ordinary means, and yielding only to the touch of the Great Physician.

(*e*) *Sin is the venom left in the system from the bite of the old serpent.* Chastisement prepares for the application of such means as shall expel that

venom from the system; for then the ear is opened to listen to heaven's remedy of the 'sanctification of the Spirit, and the belief of the truth."

Thus sanctified affliction is faithfulness to the soul's well-being. It is the office of love to save a child from that which, if allowed to remain, would prove its ruin, as in the giving of medicine under a malady, or performing a surgical operation when life is threatened.

(3.) **True to His own word of threatening and promise in the gracious covenant.** The threatenings are in the interest of His people's good, as well as the promises. As the gospel turns all curses into blessings to them that believe, so it turns all threatenings into promises. Hence, when He says, "*You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities*" (Amos iii. 2), the threatening is really a promise of benefit made on the ground of friendship. Chastisement is indeed a specific blessing of the covenant, as much as the administration of a course of medicine would be to a sick child to save it from a fatal issue. It shows the wise care of an affectionate father. It acts as a check on the soul's apostasy from God. It puts an arrest on the wayward tendency of the heart to forget God, and despise His authority. Hence the beautiful stipulation (Ps. lxxxix. 30–34). God, in love to His children, "*will not suffer sin upon them,*" but chastens them now, that they may not be condemned with the world at last. So it is never said of the wicked that God deals with them by chastisement. "*But if ye endure chastisement, God dealeth with you as with sons.*" The wicked "He knoweth not." But Israel is precious, and must be refined and preserved. The precious metal must be cast into the furnace that the tincture of alloy may be removed (Zech. xiii. 9; Rev. iii. 19; Isa. i. 25). The intention is not to destroy, but to purify; to purge, not to consume. "*He chastens for our profit, that we might become partakers of His holiness.*" Affliction is indeed love, taking a weird form of showing itself, corresponding with the malignant character of the plague it is intended to remove.

IV. The punishment set over against the sin.

It is important to bring the sin and its punishment before the eye in one view, so as to see how the one answers to the other as seed and fruit, or, as cause and effect. It is too common to look on God's judgments as events standing by themselves, separated from their procuring causes, and to place them in contrast with what might naturally be expected from the hand of Him "*who is love,*" and "*whose tender mercies are over all His works.*" A difficulty is thus created, to account for the unexpected events that have fallen out under the government of a God of love. Doubtless if we keep our eyes half shut to the disagreeable truths of our sinful condition, we are not likely to come to a well-balanced view of God's ways, and we shall find it hard to reconcile many of His providential dealings with His benignant character. But much of the difficulty disappears, when we look at the aggravated character of the sins, which preceded the judgment, and which rendered it absolutely necessary that such judgments should be inflicted. Though God is infinitely tender of the feelings of His creatures, He cannot allow a shadow of impurity to stain the administration of His Holy and righteous government. To maintain the purity of His own character, is necessarily with Him the first of all considerations.

In the present case, things had gone so far, that a shadow would have been cast on the honour of the Divine name, had something not been done to mark the Divine abhorrence of high handed sin. As an illustration of the extreme wickedness of the age, it may be mentioned, that this is generally supposed to have been about the period when the abominations of Gibeah, recorded in chaps. xix. and xx., and those of the tribe of Dan, referred to in chap. xviii. took place. But, even if this were not the case, there were

special aggravations in the fact of their lapsing into idolatry at all, and it is these we must now look at, as especially occasioning the national calamities. What were these aggravated features, and what punishment did God set over against them?

1. **There was deep-seated unbelief on their part, and rejection of them by God.** There is in every man by nature "*an evil heart of unbelief, tending to depart from the living God;*" and now these children of the covenant showed it by their disposition to forsake the God who had done so much for them in the past, and to seek after the gods of the heathen round about them. If we compare the depravity of the heart to the primary rock system, or that which lies underneath all the series of strata of which a sinful character is made up, then the position of unbelief is that of the lowest of the palæozoic strata.—Or, if we regard the heart's depravity as the protoplasm, then unbelief is the first organic form which that depravity assumes. From this arise aversion to God, evil thoughts of God, a spirit of rebellion, all manner of lusts and passions in the heart, and all manner of ungodliness in the life.

Here it was distrust that began the downward course. They had not confidence in their God, that He would give them certain victory over these mighty Canaanites. They were feeble while the enemy was strong. They looked to the arm of flesh. They did not trust in the *power* of their God to aid them effectually against all danger, notwithstanding all the examples He had given of what He could do, to overcome the most formidable opposition. Nor did they trust in His *faithfulness* to abide by His word of promise, that no man should be able to stand before them, while they were loyally engaged in the execution of His purposes. It was not for them to weigh consequences. Their only question was, What is duty? They were to see no difficulty when God gave the command. Their only thought should have been, how speedily and conscientiously shall we perform the commandment of the Lord. Whatever the strength of their adversaries, as compared with their own, it was an insult to Him, before whom "the nations were as a drop of a bucket," to doubt whether He could make "the worm Jacob thresh the mountains."

Their fundamental sin was the rejection of Jehovah as their sovereign, and this He meets by a temporary casting them off as His people. He not only stood aloof from them when danger arose, and no longer acted as their Rock, but "He sold them into the hand" of the enemy. He gave a commission to the destroyer against them. "As they had walked contrary to Him, so now He walks contrary to them." They had "cast Him behind their back," and now "He shows them the back and not the face." He no longer dwells among them, but says, *I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early.*" The expression, "He sold them," implies that He handed them over into the hands of their enemies, as if He had no more any property in them, or concern about them. It was as if He had said, "Ye are not now my people, and I am not any longer your God," or, as if He had said to the heathen, "Take them, and do as you will with them; they are yours, not mine" (see Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii). [*Pulp. Com.*] Thus they could read their sin in their punishment. They were "*left to eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.*" God said, "they are a very forward generation, children in whom is no faith; I will hide my face from them, and see what their end shall be."

2. **They sinned against their character as a holy people, and Jehovah treated them as if they were no longer holy.** Their name was, in great condescension, associated with the great and holy name of Jehovah. The blood of the Covenant was sprinkled upon them. They were "*a kingdom of priests,*" and, throughout their whole history, were dedicated to holy services. They were appointed to show forth the praise of Jehovah in connection with glorious manifestations of

His character that stretched down to future ages. In the conduct of a people so privileged, acts of disobedience were peculiarly heinous. Their sins were a profanation of their sacred position. It was like sinning against Jehovah in the Holy of Holies, as compared with doing any act of irreverence in the outer court of the Gentiles. Wilful sins on the part of God's people have always a special aggravation in that they are brought so near to God, and bound by the most sacred obligations to show their allegiance. "*I will be sanctified of all them that draw nigh to me.*"

Jehovah now acts towards them exactly according to the character which they assume. He treats them as no longer a holy people. "*He profanes the princes of the sanctuary, gives Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.*" However dear they might be to Him as His redeemed and adopted children, "*He delivers over His turtle-dove to the multitude of the wicked.*" "*He abhors His own inheritance and gives them into the hand of the heathen.*" "The Lord God hath sworn by Himself saying, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces." Wherefore He "sold them" to a Hamite prince! Imagine the Holy One of Israel selling His Church as a slave, to a hard and cruel master, having more of the instincts of a wild beast than of a man! "*Yea the Lord trod the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a wine-press; He covered her with a cloud in His anger, and did cast down from heaven to earth the beauty of Israel; He polluted the kingdom, and the princes thereof. All that passed by did clap their hands; they hissed and wagged their head, saying, 'We have swallowed her up; this is the day that we looked for; we have found it, we have seen it.'*"

3. They sinned in the violation of solemn pledges; and God acted towards them as if He had forgotten His solemn Covenant. At the foot of Sinai, when the Covenant was first publicly made with the people as a nation, they vowed solemnly in the sight of heaven, "All that the Lord hath said will we do and be obedient." This Covenant was renewed under very solemn circumstances at the moment they were about to take possession of their inheritance (Deut. xxix. 10-29). They were also a circumcised people, and so marked off for God. In all their national observances an implied pledge was given of their dedication to God's service. This was especially the case in their three great festivals year by year. Most emphatic, too, was the manner in which they pledged themselves when Joshua took leave of them as their leader, and they were to be left alone to the trial of faith and obedience. All these pledges they had now violated; they had broken God's holy covenant, and proved treacherous to their most sacred promises They had become "a people laden with iniquity." They were spiritual perjurers. And now God was saying to them, as He said to the congregation that grieved Him so long in the wilderness, "Ye shall know My breach of promise." For "*He made void the covenant* He had made with them; He profaned their crown by casting it to the ground." He had engaged to be their Rock; "*the eternal God was their refuge, and underneath them were the everlasting arms.*" And the exultant hymn was sung over them, "*Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and the sword of thine excellency?*" But though He had thus pledged Himself to protect them, He now "gives them as sheep to the slaughter; He makes them to turn back from the enemy; He makes them a byword among the heathen; He sells them for nought; and makes them a scorn and derision to them that were round about them." They were to all appearance cast off by their God. "He hid His face from them, and allowed many evils and troubles to befal them" (Ps. xliv. and Deut. xxxi. 17, 18).

4. They sinned in resisting repeated warnings: and now God hears them not after repeated cries. Never were a people more loudly warned of what terrible consequences must ensue should they enter on a course of disobedience and rebellion. The words of the great Legislator, in giving such warning, were like

those of the mighty angel at whose call "seven thunders did utter their voices." What heart, less hard than the nether millstone, could fail to be moved by the solemn appeals made in Deut. xxviii. and xxix? Scarcely less spirit-stirring, and with like fidelity, are the addresses given on the same subject in the last two chapters of the Book of Joshua. To this has to be added the special warning given by the Angel-Jehovah in Jud. ii. 1–5. Yet all this line of argument with the heart was resisted by the people, who now "*forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashtaroth.*" They stopped their ears, and would not listen. Their sins were of the nature of resisting the strivings of the Spirit of God, and implied a hardening of the heart against His entreating voice (Isa. lxiii. 10).

When they began to cry to the Lord under their grievous oppression, they found the heavens above them to be as brass. God turned to them the back of His throne, and acted as if He heard not. He virtually said to them, "*When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear.*" "*You set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof. Now also I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh,*" etc. (Jer. xi. 14). In all likelihood, shortly after their oppression began, they began to cry; but not till eight years had passed away did God listen to them, so as to relieve them. That was after all but a short period, contrasted with the period of their sinning, which must have been twenty or thirty years at least; yet it would seem a long time to their sensations, when every day would seem a week, and every hour a day, under severe suffering.

5. They sinned by showing deep ingratitude; and God acted toward them as if He had lost all love for them, and would reason with them no more. Their whole history was full of remarkable scenes and episodes, of crises and junctures, setting forth in ever fresh form the workings of the Divine love on their behalf. To forget such a history seemed an impossibility. And yet so ungrateful did they prove, that "they quickly forgot His mighty works, and the wonders that He had wrought." They acted as if they had no debt of obligation to their God. Amid the brightest beams of sunlight, they could see no claim that God had established on their love and new obedience. They were insensible, as the very stones, to "*the great goodness of God toward the house of Israel, which He had bestowed upon them according to His mercies, and the multitude of His loving-kindnesses.*" They turned a deaf ear to all the voices of these mercies in the past, and preferred to listen to the syren enticements of the false-god worship. Their sin was one of the deepest ingratitude.

Therefore God acted by them, as if He had given them up, and would reason with them no more. Ingratitude implies that love shown has been despised; and, according to the greatness of the love, was the guilt of this people. Now, therefore, He practically gives them up. "Ephraim," notwithstanding all the arguments of the Divine love to draw him back, "was joined to his idols—now he is to be let alone!" "*The bellows were burnt* (through the long trying to take away the coarse metal), *the lead was consumed of the fire, the founder had melted in vain.*" Now they are held to be "*reprobate silver, for the Lord had rejected them.*" God said of them, "I have forsaken my house; I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly-beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies."

All this representation must be understood as made from man's point of view. It is only in that view that we can speak of any change of purpose, or breach of promise. To human eyes, God's dealings with His people for a time had that appearance. But in reality "He kept truth with them for ever—His Covenant stood fast from generation to generation."

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 7, 8.

PUT AWAY THE IDOLS.

1. "God good to Israel" in requiring the idols to be put away. It is not kind dealing to let a man alone when under a deadly disease, or when hastening to cast himself over the precipice. But the wicked, after a certain measure of dealing which they have resisted, are thus let alone, in righteous punishment for their refusal to repent. "They have no bands in their death—they are not in trouble as other men." After long and earnest dealing, such as to show that God has no pleasure in their death but ardently desires their salvation, while they still reject all the offers of Divine Love, God at last "gives them up to their own hearts' lusts," and allows them to sleep the sleep of death. But "blessed is the man whom the Lord chastens, and teaches out of His law." The raid of the barbarian king was the Divine loving-kindness in a mystery.

2. It is a hard experience to have the heart purged of its idols. It is one of the "terrible things" by which "the God of our salvation in righteousness answers our prayers." The penitent cries, "Create in me a clean heart, O God!" The wise love of the covenant God replies, "From all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you."

(1). **In the furnace is it done.** There the dross is consumed, and the genuine metal is made to shine with greater distinctness. For when the heart is put to the proof, the good principle, if it exists at all, is led to assert itself with more decision, and is quickened into fresh and more vigorous life; and as it gathers strength, the heart begins to slacken hold of its idols. When a man really good at bottom is pushed by force of circumstances to say, that he must either part with his convictions altogether, or carry them out with a more resolute purpose, he is roused from his temporary torpor, and through God's grace shakes himself loose from those objects, which were competitors for his affections with his Saviour and Lord.

(2.) **It is done by the bitter experience which the heart has of these idols, so long as it clings to them.** All the enticements of sin—all the allurements of the world, are felt, even while in our hands, to be "a mockery, a delusion, and a snare." So Lot felt, while actually possessing the rich plains of Sodom, that his "righteous soul was vexed from day to day with the wicked deeds" of those among whom he dwelt. And a similar experience had these Israelites when dwelling with the Canaanites that remained in the land. They were "thorns in their sides," and "scourges" and "snares," so long as they had to do with them.

(3). **Also by the great miseries which idols bring on a man in the long run.** *Lot* was ruined as regards this world. *Solomon* lost his God-given peace in his latter days. *Jacob* spent a great part of his life under an eclipse, on account of his idols, but being a man of great prayer and faith, his star shone out brightly in the end. *Hezekiah*, for idolising his treasures in the sight of the messengers of the king of Babylon, was assured that in the end these treasures would be all seized, and carried away as spoil by that rapacious monarch. *David* found that the two members of his family whom he had specially indulged and idolised, turned out in the end to be the two greatest miseries of his life—Absalom and Adonijah. *Jehoshaphat* very nearly lost his life at Ramoth-gilead, and afterwards had all his ships broken at Ezion-gaber, because he made an idol of his friendship with the house of Ahab. And these *Israelites*, who accepted the gods of the Canaanites, found ere long that "*their sorrows are multiplied that hasten after another god.*" All the flatteries of sin, and the promises of the world, after a short

experience, not only sting with disappointment, but plunge the soul into untold grief, if not despair. By and bye, the really good man feels that he must cut off a right hand and pluck out a right eye, rather than having two hands and two eyes to be cast into the fire. At last he learns the folly of choosing any other object for his true and proper portion but God Himself.

(4.) The troubles of life generally help this result when sanctified. As the dashings of the wave preserve the salubrity of the ocean, and prevent its waters from lapsing into putrefaction, which a state of stagnancy would certainly produce, so days of trial, though unwelcome to flesh and blood, are most salutary for the purging of the good man's character and advancing the work of sanctification, in view of entering heaven at last. It is dangerous for the Christian to get settled on his lees, but nothing is more beneficial for health than to be emptied from vessel to vessel.

The Afflictions of God's People are Never Penal.

This distinction is of the utmost importance. Israel being in covenant with God, none of the calamities which befell them at the hands of the nations round about were sent as a legal retribution for their sins before their God. Whatever the measure of their severity, they were but the chastisement of a wise and loving Father, with whom a foundation of peace had already been established. They were the corrections of the rod in a Father's hand, not the vengeance of the sword in the hands of an angry Judge.

I. The people of God have a sin-bearer. Though alike unworthy with others, there is one provided for them "*on whom all their iniquities are laid*," and by whom they are all borne away. What other meaning can be given to all the sacrifices so strictly required to be laid on the altar from age to age, through their whole history, by the covenant people? They were so many fingers that pointed down, through the long period of waiting, to the "Lamb of God," whose offering should for ever "put an end to sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness." The privilege of having such a sin-bearer as one's own is, indeed, open to all, but it is only on those by whom it is accepted that the benefits are actually conferred—the people of God. This gives a new complexion to all God's dealings with them. The sufferings which they endure in connection with their sins are not the legal punishment due to their sins, nor any part of it. That is already inflicted on a substitute, that they may go free. And this principle of substitutionary sacrifice is steadily kept in view from the days of Abraham, and onward—more visibly from the era of the Mosaic institutions and onwards—and forms the reason for God's dealing with His people in the way of correction and discipline, and not of retributive judgment. Retribution being exacted on the substitute, there is no need to exact it also on the person of the offender. In the times of the Judges, there is, indeed, little or no reference made to the observance of sacrificial worship among the people, but God had established this system among them with great solemnity; and He Himself pays jealous respect to His own ordinance, whether the people do so, or not.

II. The unusual character of this arrangement. Many object to a proceeding so different from the ordinary course of law as *to lay the punishment deserved on another different from the offender himself*, and ask in wonder, *Why should the innocent suffer for the guilty?*" The reply is, that God Himself proposes to us this method for disposing of our sins. He Himself provides the substitute, and in the exercise of His prerogative as Lawgiver and Judge, He necessarily must endorse His own plan. The practical

value of the plan is, that all who accept of this substitute receive the full benefit of His substitution, and every sin which they commit is counted to have been legally punished in Him (2 Cor. v. 21).

When a rational creature violates the laws of God's moral government, it is not for human reason to determine what should be done in the emergency—whether the laws are to hold on in their natural course by the infliction of death on the offender, or whether Mercy, in some form, is to come in to operate; and if so, in what form? That is a question where there are no fixed rules to guide us—where reason therefore has no vocation—where, indeed, it remains entirely with the good pleasure of the Lawgiver and Father to say what He wishes to be done. Our proper course in such a case is to cease to reason, and receive reverently the Divine testimony as to the method of dealing which He proposes to take.

But sin is something abnormal; we may expect therefore something abnormal in the means devised for disposing of it. And there is much about the method proposed, which marks it as above the sphere of reason to judge of it. Our duty is not to determine the question for ourselves, but to hear the voice of "Him with whom we have to do." "*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifieth*"—in the method proposed in the gospel. "*Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ, who died*"—as the substitute—not any ordinary subject of government, who required to obey the law for himself, and who had no power to give away himself as he pleased, because he was not himself his own property—but "it is Christ who died"—an extraordinay Person, and who therefore could meet the extraordinay condition of things—"yea rather, who is risen again," etc., sure proof that the penalty has been exhausted, and that no more suffering work has to be gone through. Thus the Lawgiver is Himself the Saviour, and we rely on such a method as He has Himself devised to meet the case, on His own testimony.

III. **The legal punishment due to His people's sins already borne by their sin-bearer.** The proper penalty of sin is of the nature of destruction, as opposed to correction or discipline. "The wages of sin is death." The creature by sinning forfeits his existence, or all that properly constitutes life. He forfeits the smile of Him that made him, and falls under His frown; which means the loss of all possible happiness, and liability to all possible misery. For the smile or frown of his Creator is, to a creature made after his image, the sum total of all possible good, or all possible evil. Such a creature, losing the image of God, and so becoming depraved, or, disobeying the will of his Creator, and so ceasing to serve the purpose for which he was created, according to all rules of righteousness, forfeits his existence. But the principle of a substitute being admitted, that substitute undertakes all the sinner's liabilities, and suffers death under the frown of the Lawgiver. This is what Christ did. In the room of sinners He endured the full force of the Divine frown against their sins, as an exhibition of the treatment which they deserved; and so infinite in its grandeur is that exhibition, from the fact especially that the Person who was chosen to act as substitute was Divine, as well as human, that nothing farther is required as an expiation for any number of sins, or for any class of sinners. It is the unspeakable privilege of all who trust in Christ as their substitute, that the full effect of what He has done to vindicate the purity of the Divine character, and the honour of the Divine government should be regarded to them as if they had done it personally, seeing it was done expressly in their stead, and with the intention of being for their benefit. Hence the precious statement, that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth." In Him to whom they are united by faith so as to become

one with Him, the full desert of their sins has been suffered—of *all* their sins whatever the number, and there now remains no more any penal consequences for those terrible sins! Who can estimate the magnitude of such a privilege?

IV. **What then is the precise character of the afflictions of the people of God?** Are they not caused by sin—the consequence either of overt acts committed, or of sin still lingering in their hearts? If so, why should they not be regarded as the proper punishment of sin? If they are called chastisement, how does that differ from proper punishment?

1. **Legal punishment is the expression of the Divine wrath directed against sin, bearing death to the sinner.** It implies that in giving to sin what is its due, the whole weight of the Divine displeasure must come down upon it, which can result in nothing but destruction to the creature, and that this in fact is the creature's desert because of his sin. We do not suppose for a moment that God hates any creature that He has made merely as a creature, It is not in His nature to do so. But when a creature cherishes sin, commits sin, and clings to sin, notwithstanding every argument used to induce him to separate himself from it, then He must bear the expression of the Divine wrath which necessarily goes forth against his sin. Thus, punishment is the expression of judicial anger directed against sin, giving to it its due desert in utter destruction. As opposed to this, chastisement is the expression of fatherly displeasure, needed to convey to the child proper views of the evil of his conduct, to show the deep offence given to the father, and to point out the necessity of amendment of ways. It is all in the way of correction, reformation, or discipline, and not of retribution.

2. **In chastisement, whatever the sufferings be, they are always partial and limited, never going the length of destruction, but only intended to correct and improve.** In marking the difference between retribution and chastisement, God says, "*I will make a full end of all the nations, yet will I not make a full end of thee; I will correct thee in measure*" (Jer. xxx. 11). And again He says, "*I am very sore displeased with the heathen*" (*i.e.*, for what they did in afflicting Israel) "*for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.*" In showing His anger against His people, He never goes the full length of what they deserve. It is never a penal infliction (Zech. i. 15). Perhaps it is in this sense that the expression is used. "*Jerusalem hath received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins*" (Isa. xl. 2)—according to the rule of expressing only fatherly displeasure against His own people, not judicial wrath. The sufferings are limited, not being the expression of the full amount of what is deserved, but being intended to correct and improve.

V. **The purpose served by these afflictions.**

1. **To keep alive in their minds a reverent sense of what is due to God's character and law.** Being yet but very partially sanctified, and the old roots of evil being still strong in their hearts, there is the need of some powerful restraint on the outbreak of evil, in view of the fact that they are entirely freed from the penal consequences of sin. They must learn to "stand in awe, and sin not." They must be taught the profound reverence which is due to the character and the law of their God—that "great fear is due unto His name," and that profound regard must be had to His authority in all that He requires—that there must be no transgression of His holy commandments, and no trifling with His merciful forbearance—that right conceptions must be kept up of what is due to His Infinite Majesty and unsullied Holiness, and that there must be no slackening of His Divine authority. It is all-important to notice that in the manner in which this lesson is taught, mercy is so much mingled with judgment, that the element of harshness is entirely elimi-

nated from the dispensation, so that it wears the soft aspect of a chastisement, and not the stern appearance of a retribution.

2. To teach them the offensive and deadly nature of sin. Though forgiven for the Redeemer's sake, they must be taught that sin covers the Divine face with anger, puts a stop to intercourse with God, and prevents the outflow of Divine blessings. The bitter nature of sin must be seen in the bitterness of its fruits. They must see that sin from its very nature leads to grief and sorrow, and but for the mercy of God in the gospel arrangement, would inevitably lead to their ruin. They must realise that they cannot sin with impunity, for the "end of all sinful ways is death." And especially they must understand, that by the Gospel itself they cannot be saved, if they were to continue in sin; and that its whole drift and bearing is to save them from sin itself as well as from its consequences.

3. To impress on them the great duty of cultivating personal holiness. "*He corrects us that we may become partakers of His holiness.*" "He prunes the branches that they may become more fruitful." (*a*) *They remind of the extreme inconsistency of sin in a child of God.* Every affliction as a bitter fruit of sin teaches, that it is not for one that is born of God to commit sin—that his practice in so far as he indulges in sin is most incongruous with his calling. He is kindly but pointedly told that "*the flesh must be crucified with the affections and lusts*" in the interest of the sanctification of the soul. He is reminded of the great law of the new life, that, in becoming Christ's, he is "dead to sin." And "*how shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*"

(*b*) *They prevent the heart from fixing on earthly objects.* They break our cisterns which we would fill with earthly joys; they wither our gourds, or fond earthly comforts; they destroy our idols which we would place in the room of our God; they dry up our earthly streams, and lead us to look away to the fountains of living water which Christ has opened up, and to look for our rest under "*The shadow of the great rock in the weary land.*" They form checks and disappointments to us in our earthly pursuits and hopes, that we may learn that all earthly objects in the end prove to be "vanity and vexation of spirit;" that there is no true happiness but in God, and no home but in heaven.

(*c*) *They lead to the subduing of the evil passions and corrupt propensities of the soul.* Afflictions, especially all great trials, which lift a man quite off his feet, when "the floods come in unto his soul," teach a man most effectually his great helplessness, and feebleness. Thus the foundations of pride and self-sufficiency are shaken, and he learns better the lesson of "not thinking more highly of himself than he ought to think." The heart of stone is in a condition to become a heart of flesh. There is less of the obstinate self-will, and more of the obedient ear and willing mind. The imperious will is broken, and there is more of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." The spirit of patience and submission prevails, and realising the hallowing influence of the Divine dealings, he begins to say, "*It was good for me that I was afflicted.*"

(*d*) *They reveal to the soul the low mark of its piety.* No light is so true by which the soul may test its real character as that of the fires of affliction. There the magnifying influence of self-flattery disappears, and the meagre attainments are seen in their proper proportions. A faithful voice warns the soul to the following effect: Is it fit that one, who is "risen to sit with Christ in heavenly places," who has been called to live in a Holy world, to breath a Holy atmosphere, to be the associate of Holy companions, and to spend existence in Holy pursuits—should live here at so low a mark of personal piety, should walk so closely on the borders of sin, and make such a poor appearance of the fruits of righteousness in the practical life. Is it seemly that a man who professes

to be linked by a tender tie, and linked inseparably with the only-begotten Son of God, who is honoured with His pure fellowship and enjoys His Almighty guardianship, and who is at last to dwell with Him in His home, and share with Him in His joys and honours, should spend his religious life now in a state of languor and gloom, as if "scarce half he seemed to live, and were dead more than half,"—is it fit that such a man should lead a life which is scarcely above the mark of those who are content to grovel among the things of time and sense? O how unbecoming for one who is destined to wear priestly robes of fine linen, white and clean, to be found wallowing in the mire and pollution of the horrible pit out of which he has been drawn! It is little worthy of the heir of untold treasures in the skies, to spend so much of his time and his energies here. in grasping at the dross and the dust of this earthly scene. It looks ill to see a man who has so large an interest in eternity looking with too keen an eye on the few pebbles he may be able to pick up on the shores of time. What a coming down from his high standpoint is it for one whose destiny is brighter than that of a seraph, to be ever complaining of the few trials that are mixed up with his lot in this his temporary dwelling-place?

(e) When sanctified, the afflictions of God's people lead them to aim at a higher mark of the Christian life. Warned by their sufferings that their time on earth is so short on the one hand, and that the Christian life is the only true life, on the other, they give themselves more sincerely and devotedly to secure the aims of that life. Voices around them seem to say, "Why should one with such prospects as yours live like the drudges of Satan, or the slaves of sin?" "Are you called to be an heir of glory, though equally undeserving with any worldling by your side, and will you not show your gratitude by cultivating a tone of speech and temper of mind, far above that of the grovelling earth-worm? How careful of its speech should that tongue be that is soon to sing so sweetly, and so loudly, the praises of redeeming grace! How high should those feet be lifted above the pollutions of the world, which are ere long to tread the streets of pure gold like unto transparent glass! How pure a sanctuary should that heart be which is destined to become for ever the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory! How clean should those hands be that are dedicated for ever to Temple service! How rapidly should that race be run which leads to a weight of glory! How manfully should that battle be fought, which, you know, shall end in the crushing of every enemy, and gaining a complete and everlasting triumph! Lay aside, then, all weights, and run with patience the appointed race; fight prayerfully the good fight, and soon you shall be a conqueror and more."

Afflictions coming from the Hand of God, and from the Hand of Man.

All affliction to God's people comes either as directly *sent* by Him, or expressly *permitted* by Him. "*Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?*" There is a difference between trouble as sent *directly* from God's hand, as in the case of famine, pestilence, or the earthquake, and trouble as sent *through the agency of man*, as in the case of being delivered up into the hands of enemies of our own race. David had experience of both ways, and decidedly preferred the former, when he must choose the one or the other (2 Sam. xxiv. 14). What is the difference between the one mode and the other, that there should be a ground of preference? The following considerations will help us to judge how much better it is to have our afflictions coming directly from the hand of God, than coming through the agency of man:—

I. On God's side there is always much cause for sending the affliction; on man's side there is little, and often no reason. To God we are responsible for the whole of our moral conduct. In the whole domain of conscience it is "with Him we have to do;" and before Him we have contracted a debt of more than ten thousand talents, so that there is the highest reason to expect He would send upon us the severest use of the rod. But to man we are not responsible at all in the province of conscience; and though we owe him many duties of love and kindness under the second table of the law, it is not to him we have to answer for the manner in which we fulfil these duties, but to God, whose subjects alone we are. Man, indeed, is at best only a subject himself, and not a governor; and he only goes out of his place when he presumes to take any part of the moral government of the world into his hands. Besides, such debt as we owe to man is relatively less than one hundred pence, and therefore trifling compared with what we owe to God. David had grievously sinned against both Uriah and Bathsheba; yet, so much greater did his sin seem which he had committed against God, that he speaks of it as his only sin (Ps. li. 4).

II. God never errs in the judgment He forms of men's characters and conduct; man is often and greatly mistaken. "*The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth—His eyes behold, His eyelids try the children of men—there is not a word in my tongue but thou knowest it altogether; thou hast beset me behind and before—He knows what is in man.*" He is the Author of that word which "discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart." In prayer He hears the thoughts of the heart, whether "uttered or unexpressed." He cannot therefore in any case inflict an unrighteous sentence, either by punishing the wrong person, or punishing where there has been no fault at all, or punishing in excess of the actual requirements of the case when fault has been committed. "*The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed.*" There is never a disturbance of the exact balance of justice when measuring out to men what is due, on the account of not knowing the exact merits of every case. If there is any such disturbance, it is all on the side of mercy to the offender.

Man, however, is often hasty, rash, and greatly mistaken in his judgment of the conduct, as well as the character of his fellow man. His knowledge of the case is always limited—the motives from which his fellow may have acted, his precise intentions in the case, the circumstances in which he was placed, his ignorance of what was duty, and many other elements which must be taken into account in forming a complete judgment. Thus afflictions coming from the hand of God are greatly in contrast with those coming from the hand of man, because in the one case there is a perfect knowledge of every element, and feature of character and conduct, while in the other there is always imperfect knowledge, and sometimes serious errors of judgment all through.

III. God is never actuated by any unholy spirit in His judgment and dealings, while man is liable to be swayed by many selfish and evil passions. God always acts from principle, with some holy and wise end in view. No such elements as prejudice, ill will, or evil passion of any kind can exist in the Divine mind, from the very necessity of His nature. "*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*" Neither can a spirit of revenge find a place in His bosom, for there is no foundation for any such feeling in His nature as God. He is therefore always calm and measured in the afflictions He sends on His people. He also exercises great tenderness of dealing and wise consideration of all the circumstances—"staying His rough wind in the day of His east wind, "correcting in measure," "not always wroth, lest the spirit should fail before

Him," causing the "weeping to endure but for a night and bringing joy in the morning,"—"with the trial making a way of escape."

With man on the contrary there is often a spirit of malice and revenge, a desire to oppress or crush, or a desire to exalt himself by the humiliation of his neighbour—it may be, a desire to rule over his neighbour, and to make profit by his loss. Or there is often the harbouring unjustifiably of evil thoughts, which have only an imaginary foundation, or a very slight foundation in fact—an evil interpretation of appearances which are susceptible of a satisfactory explanation, with many such feelings to warp the judgment, and bring down affliction unrighteously.

IV. God always thinks of a wise and merciful result; man is often inconsiderate and regardless of consequences. "*Happy is the man whom the Lord correcteth, for though He cause grief He will have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies, for He doth not afflict willingly,*" etc. It is really for the best interests of the soul itself that He proceeds with the work of chastisement to cure of worldliness, of pride, of backsliding, of some easily besetting sin, or to quicken diligence, zeal, devotedness, self denial, godliness, or some other element of the Divine life. The soul itself often vindicates the hand that smites it by saying, "I know that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me." But man, when he has the opportunity to afflict, is often capricious in his acts as well as in his judgments, proceeds with blind indifference, if not intentional cruelty, is indiscriminate in his strokes, and is sometimes even reckless as to results, provided only his own purposes can be carried out.

V. God is more easily entreated by the voice of prayer. Though Ephraim was an incorrigible offender and seemed for the most part unmoved when even "hewed" with the strong words of God through His prophets, the moment he turns again, the ear of his God listens —"*I have heard—I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, 'Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised—turn thou me and I shall be turned'*" (Jer. xxxi. 18, etc.). Amid all the stern work of the captivity, the afflicting God was yet the Saviour, and assures them, "*Then shall ye call upon me, and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me and find me when ye search for me with all your heart.*" So it was with Saul of Tarsus. The moment he repents and lifts his cry to heaven, the exalted Saviour listens, and says of him, "Behold he prayeth!" Similar assurances are given of God's willingness to be entreated under the afflictions of the rod (Ps. l. 15.; Matt. xviii. 27.; James v. 13.; Ps. xxxiv. 4, 6, etc.). Man, however, is so different, that he may hear our cry to-day, and be deaf to all entreaties to-morrow; when the case may be most reasonable he is most impracticable; and what he does give the hope of doing at one time, he will fail to fulfil when the period arrives. His decisions are regulated by caprice, or convenience, and not by justice or the kindness required by the golden rule.

HATRED OF THE WORLD TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

Of this the incursions made by the heathen nations from time to time were striking illustrations. Their purpose was thus expressed—"*Come, let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.*" The confederacy is given in Ps. lxxxiii. 5–8. They specially disliked the God of Israel, because He could make no peace with their gods, nor even tolerate their very existence. The people too dwelt alone and did not commingle with the other nations, but observed religious customs

and manners different from all others. Moreover the God of Israel had been most severe in inflicting overthrow and calamity on all the nations that came in contact with that people. In this we see a type of the hatred which the representatives of the world cherish to the church and people of God.

I. **This hatred has always existed.** The case given in this chapter is no solitary instance of God's people being hated by the world, and of a conspiracy being formed for their ruin. This spirit of antagonism was foreshadowed by the case of the "woman's seed," and the "serpent's seed." On this principle Cain hated Abel (1 John iii. 12), and the apostle adds "Marvel not if the world hate you," for many reasons which he specifies. The child of the bondwoman did persecute the child of the free (Gal. iv. 29). Pharaoh and his people tried to crush the infant Church in Egypt—in its cradle; so did Herod seek to destroy the child Jesus. The king of Moab sent to the famous soothsayer among the mountains of the East, saying, "Come curse me this people." And all through the history of that people, the nations were ever glad when they could get an opportunity of giving a deadly thrust to Israel. The same feeling still prevails and always has prevailed between the world and the Church. The weapons employed have been persecution in all its forms, where that was possible. And when not practicable, all kinds of oppression, unjust and harsh dealing, detraction and slander, proscription, raillery, revilings, and reproaches.

II. **This hatred has a deep root.** The world hates the image of God, wherever it is seen. Birds of the night hate the sun. Christ says, "*Ye know that the world hated me before it hated you.*" And again He says, "*Me it hateth because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil.*" Indeed no two personalities are more antagonistic than Christ and the world. It is the opposition of the embodiment of sin, to the personification of all holiness. The owls and the bats flee from the morning beam. The fifth angel poured out his vial on the seat of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness, and they gnawed their tongues for pain. Thus bitterly did they resent it. So when the enemies heard Stephen preach, "they gnashed on him with their teeth."

III. **Christ gives complete victory over the world's hatred.** "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace." While the world is doing its utmost to cause trouble, Christ, working more mightily still, is at the same moment producing peace. There is more in Christ's smile than in all the world's frown. Madame Guyon, who suffered severely on every side, from an unhappy union in marriage, from the loss of children and friends by death, from the alienation of affection by calumny, from persecution for the truth's sake—thrown first into one prison, then into another, then into a third, then into a fourth, and finally banished from her home till she died—was yet oftentimes in heart overflowing with joy, because of the peace of Christ. "Oh," she cries, "the unspeakable happiness of belonging to Jesus Christ! This is the balm which sweetens all pains. The satisfaction and joy I feel in being a prisoner, and in suffering for Christ, are inexpressible. I seem like a little bird which God has placed in a cage with nothing to do but to sing." Her prison walls grew warm as she literally sang for joy. So felt Paul in the Roman dungeon. Alone — unbefriended — unsuccoured, this was yet the happiest man in Rome. Among the millions within her wide walls, not another heart was so buoyant with hope, so lifted up with joy. That dark and cheerless cell was his last resting-place on earth. Soon his feet should stand within the gates of the New Jerusalem. One of the loftiest seats around the throne should soon be his. One of the sweetest songs in the land of joy should soon be raised by him. Shielded by such a faith,

animated by such a hope, he rose above and beyond all the horrors of his condition. His afflictions became light, and lighter still, until he felt them not at all. So, too, it was with Bunyan in Bedford jail. And thus it was with a long line of martyrs in every age. "The Christian is fed by Christ's hand, carried in His heart, supported by His arm, nursed in His bosom, guided by His eye, instructed by His lips, and warmed by His love. His wounds are his life, His smile the light of his path, the health of his soul, his rest and heaven here below." [*Balfern.*]

The world is a vanquished enemy—it is crucified to the Christian, and he to it.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 9–11.

V. The salutary effect of the Divine Chastisement.

"They cried unto the Lord" Here, in a small nut, we have a large kernel. In all parts of Scripture we are ever coming on unexpected riches, if only we look carefully, and dig deeply. How many thoughts all apposite are wrapped up in this short statement! It teaches the following truths:—

I. Severe chastisement awakens from the sleep in sin. All these many years, they had been living without any proper sense of the evil of their conduct, in leaving off the worship and service of the covenant God, bowing down to idols, and practising systematically known sin. They had been acting as men who were buried in deep slumber. They had become dead to all sense of guilt, and were unconscious of the clouds of wrath that were rapidly gathering over them. Now with rough, but kind hand, they are awakened, and begin to realise, the first time for many years, the aggravation of their sin, and the magnitude of their danger. "Those who would hardly speak to God in the day of ease, now cry to Him with importunity." [*Henry.*] Sin leads a man to shut his eyes, that he may not be startled by looking at the wickedness of what he is doing, and to shut his ears, that he may not hear the condemning and warning voices, that are uttered respecting his conduct. By continuing often thus to close both eyes and ears, while the practice of sin goes on, his insensibility grows until it becomes practically a deep sleep.

To be awakened out of sleep is the first beneficial effect of severe chastisement. The sinner comes to know how things stand between him and his God. Sin is seen to be a gift presented by man's enemy to lure on to man's ruin. It is a Trojan horse introduced into the soul, full of armed men, and of the instruments of death. It is seen to be a thing serious enough to awaken the thunders of justice, or to bring an earthquake after it as a natural sequence. Every act of sin is felt to be equally solemn with the first act, at the commission of which the poet says,

> "Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat,
> Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe
> That all was lost."

2. It shows the folly of trusting to one's own resources against the day of trial.

(1.) Men are ever disposed to pride themselves on their own sufficiency. They boast of their physical strength, or their mental endowments, their stores of knowledge, their skill, tact, social influence, high position, or great possessions.

(2.) In the day of trial these are found to be broken reeds. The Israelites had doubtless their well-smoothed arguments for justifying themselves in their evil course. Yet when the shock of calamity actually came, they were undeceived in a moment. It was an experience they had not thought of. It

seemed as if a rock had fallen upon them, and they felt crushed under it. They felt themselves to be entirely helpless. A more bitter cry could not have been raised if the whole nation had been put upon the rack. When they thought of the brave days of old, they fancied themselves equal to any emergency, and trusted accordingly. They had long enjoyed the prestige of being more than a match for all the nations of Canaan, north and south—none had been able to stand before them. And who was this proud bison from the prairies of Mesopotamia, that he should advance against a nation of heroes, that knew no defeat in a hundred fights, under the captaincy of the noble Joshua? Had they not good reason to be self-reliant and dauntless?

(3.) But they were unmindful of the real source of their strength. Vainly assuming that in their own arm slumbered the prowess that overthrew the Canaanite, they counted that the future would be as the past, though "*they had forsaken the God who made them, and lightly esteemed the rock of their salvation.*" It was thus they met the foe, and, as might have been anticipated, they went down before him as the frail reed before the rushing cataract. Now we see them floundering helplessly in the gulf for a period of eight years, and, with their eyes at length opened to their extreme wretchedness, they come back, with a wailing cry, to Him from whom they had so guiltily wandered.

(4.) This self-trust proceeds from self-ignorance. In the day of peace, men are confident and boastful, while as yet they have not measured their strength with the forces they shall have to contend with in the time of trouble. When they "*prosper in the world and increase in riches, they speak loftily, and their tongue walketh through the earth.*" "*The wicked man saith in his heart, I shall not be moved, I shall never be in adversity. The Lord shall laugh at him, because He seeth that his day is coming.*" Men may, for a time, be great in power and wealth, like the vine planted by the waters, which is fruitful and full of branches; they may have strong rods as sceptres of influence in society, and their stature may be exalted among the thick branches, yet if they have neglected to prepare for the great trial of the future, the hour is approaching when they shall be plucked up, and cast to the ground—the east wind drying up their fruit, their strong rods broken and withered, and the fire consuming them (Ezek. xix. 10–12).

3. It shows that idols are worthless as a refuge.

(1.) It is an instructive fact that throughout their entire history the people of Israel never apply to their idols for help, when they get into deep waters. In Elijah's day, when the tide of idolatry was at its high-water mark, we do indeed hear the cry raised, "O Baal, hear us!" but it was not the people themselves who raised it. King Ahaziah did send to enquire of "the god of Ekron," as to his cure from the serious injury he had sustained. But he was a son of the wicked Jezebel; and this must be held to be an exceptional case. As a rule, conscience was so far awakened by the occurrence of stern trials, that the make-believes of their hypocrisy were dissipated, and they fell back on their sincere convictions. Days of crushing sorrow proved too clearly that "other gods were but dumb idols," and that confusion must be the portion of "those who serve graven images" (see ch. x. 13–15; Jer. ii. 28; Isa. x. 3). "Idols are the work of men's hands, but our God is in the heavens" (Ps. cxv.).

(2.) Examples.

Wolsey made an idol of his king, and was cruelly deserted by him at the last. He died with the bitter confession on his lips, that "had he served his God as faithfully as he had served his king, he would not have forsaken him in his grey hairs." *Haman* made an idol of worldly honour, but that did nothing to save him when he fell under the wrath of the king. *Lot* made an idol of his worldly possessions, but he lost them all, and barely escaped with life itself, in the flood

of ruin which overwhelmed Sodom. The same truth is illustrated in one of the parables given by the Saviour; and any representation of truth made by Him, even in parable, must be held to be equally correct with any recorded fact of history. The rich man "*whose grounds brought forth plentifully*," and who so idolized his wealth that he "*resolved to pull down his barns and build greater*," did not on that account save himself from the doom then impending over his head. *Judas Achan, Demas, Simon Magus, Ananias and Sapphira*, all made idols of this world's wealth or good things, yet they are all witnesses that idols are worthless as a refuge in the day of trial. Even religion itself, if it is idolized simply as a fashionable religion, will not prove a refuge in the hour of trial. It has been told recently of a man, in a country district, that he walked habitually four miles every Lord's Day in order to hear a living gospel preached in an humble edifice, though his house was within a few yards of a large and fashionable church, to which multitudes thronged. "The fashionable religion," he said, "is all very well to live with, but it will not do to die with."

4. It leads instinctively to prayer to God as the true refuge. "They cried to the Lord." Though they had forsaken Him, they still believed, in the deepest convictions of their heart, that He, and He alone, was the true God. This is very instructive.

(1.) **It is the heart's spontaneous testimony.** So long as the sunshine of peace lasts, and the delusions of sin remain unbroken, the soul keeps chanting to the strain, "I have loved idols, and after them will I go." But the moment a great peril arises, and a life-struggle is entered on, instinctively it "shuffles off" all the incrustations of false belief, and goes straight to the God of its being, and importunately pleads. Could anything more effectually testify to the lying character of the teachings of sin, and the solid truth of all that God testifies respecting Himself? When appeal is made to the soul's deepest convictions, the response comes like a trap rock shooting up through all the superincumbent strata of unbelief, that God is the only true refuge of the soul in the day of deep distress. With passionate cry it is confessed that the Creator is necessary to the creature, that His favour is its life, and that without Him all is lost. The innate convictions of the heart give the lie to its acquired creed.

(2.) **The cry is as instinctive and sincere in the unbeliever as in the believer** *Paine*, who spent his days in blasphemy and ridicule of religion, and who boasted that with his axe he had cut down every tree in the forest of Christianity, leaving only a few saplings untouched, when he found himself amid the billows of the Atlantic, the vessel in which he sailed tossed like a straw on their crest, and every moment about to be engulphed, is found on his knees crying aloud to the God, whose existence he had denied, and whose name he had for years profaned, the most earnest praying-man in the ship, as he had need to be, beseeching the Almighty with tears and supplications to have mercy on his soul! What a picture alike of the hollowness, and revolting impiety of infidelity! And when, afterwards, death itself actually came, he found no other protection to cling to but the very God to whom all through life he had reviled in the language of ribaldry and cursing. In "the last alarms" he was heard crying out hundreds of times, "O, God! help me! O, Jesus Christ, help me! help me! In thy great mercy, help me!" *Volney*, notwithstanding his atheistical belief during a severe storm at sea, was seen running about in the greatest alarm crying out, "O, God, help, help! O, my God! what shall I do? what shall I do?" Even *Voltaire*, who occupied the bad pre-eminence of being esteemed the arch-unbeliever of his day, and who wasted the most brilliant mental endowments ever conferred on man, in reckless vituperations against the Christian faith and satirical mockery of all things Divine, turned coward in a most humiliating manner at the approach of the last enemy. The

prey of anguish and abject terror, he alternately supplicated and blasphemed the God, against whom he had so defiantly raised his puny arm. And while his last sands were running out, so long as speech was continued to him, he called aloud in the most plaintive accents, "Oh, Christ! Oh, Jesus Christ! help me! help me!" Other instances we have in Jonah's shipmates; the disciples in the storm; Peter walking on the water (Jonah i. 5, 6; Mark iv. 38; Matt. xiv. 30), and the general examples referred to in Ps. cvii. 6, 12-13, 18-20, 28, also Ps. lxxviii. 34). Indeed, when anyone is suddenly confronted with death, the ejaculation involuntarily springs from his lips, "May God have mercy on my soul!"

(3.) It proves how impossible it is to banish God from the human mind. The stoutest heart gives the same testimony with the tenderest. When no danger is in sight, "*the fool saith in his heart there is no God.*" Rather, "he *keeps saying* this in his heart," as if to keep down the fears ever rising up that there is a God, or as if to banish the disturbing evidences breaking in here and there, and on all sides. His strong wish that there were none, is the real cause of all his forced repetitions that there is none. For if there is, then it is all wrong with him. But God has so formed the human heart, that, notwithstanding all the violence done to its natural instincts, through the working of its depravity, when the real test is applied, its needle always points to the Great Supreme, as the being who made it, who preserves it, to whom it is responsible for its moral conduct, and who holds its destiny for good or evil entirely in His hands. Even those who, like Cain, "have gone out from the presence of the Lord into the land of Nod (the land of distance)," and have practically tried to spend life without God in any of their thoughts, are, at certain moments, checked by certain upheavals in their own breasts of forces too deep down in their nature for them to be able to control. At those moments, even those who say they are conscious only of the existence of the *ego*, are constrained to admit that there is also One who made the *ego*, who made it what it is, and who made it to be responsible to Himself. No gathered crust of atheistical assumptions, or maxims, however compacted by reasoning or speculation, or hardening by habitual practice, shall be able for a moment to resist the subterranean force when it begins to act, or suppress the upstarting conviction, that it is everything for a man to find His favour through the Crucified One of the blessed Gospel.

5. Severe chastisement prepares the way for true penitence.

(1.) Not necessarily so; sometimes it hardens. Some substances become harder as they are exposed to the action of fire. In like manner, certain characters become more stubborn under severe distresses. God puts a mark on King Ahaz, because "*in the time of his distress he trespassed yet more and more against the Lord; this is that King Ahaz*" (2 Chron. xxviii. 22). Some, when reproved, harden their necks. *Pharaoh's* heart seemed to become more hard as the infliction of the plagues went on. *Cain*, instead of repenting after he heard of his awful sentence, went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod. He went as far away from God as he could go. He became a restless wanderer. There are some indeed, who, when pursued by the terrors of the Lord, in place of returning to Him by mourning and humiliation for their sins, prefer to commit suicide. Thus did *Judas*. Similar is the story told of *Sardanapalus*, the last King of Assyria, who, when his capital was besieged, and seeing no possibility of escape, shut himself up, with all his household and his goods, in the royal palace, and, with his own hands, in despair, applied the lighted torch, turning the whole into a vast funeral pile! So—

"The scorpion girt by fire,
In circle narrowing as it glows,
The flames around their captives close;
Till inly searched by thousand throes,
And maddening in her ire,
One and sole relief she knows
—her sting;
Gives but one pang and cures all pain,
And darts into her desperate brain."

Others have been so accustomed to give the full force of their wills to sinful practices, that they have become thoroughly enslaved, and though they have their eyes open to its worst consequences, they will not repent, but plunge more wildly than before into the destructive vortex (Isa. i. 5), etc. But to those who are not altogether infatuated by sin, severe affliction, when the Divine blessing goes with it, prepares the way for true penitence. For—

(2.) The heart must find relief from its misery. The avalanche which now came down on the homes of Israel from the distant north, was an overwhelming evil. They were compelled to cry to their God, through the pure force of their misery. Conscience was awakened, and they became alive to the fact, that all this had happened to them because they had forsaken their God. The conviction would thus arise that there was nothing to be got in a life of sin, but misery, and misery ever deepening. In all directions, where they might look, they found no other result but this. "The end of these ways was death." They saw that the necessary effect of sin was to put them into a state of war with God; for the man who sins becomes a criminal before his God, and must count on God as his enemy. And who would madly "rush against the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler?" Who could dare to contend in battle with the great "I am?" As the soul values its own peace with God, it feels shut up to the step of returning to God. Feeling the hopelessness of opposition to God, they find they must at least feign submission to Him as their God, to save themselves from absolute ruin. Their cry for relief was a necessity, and whatever objection the evil heart might have to holding fellowship with a holy God, under ordinary circumstances, they felt that in their present circumstances there was no alternative. They must come to be at peace with Him under any conditions. Their stubborn wills must bow before an imperious necessity. They are checkmated at every point all round the compass. They cannot carry on the strife against the God of their being; for "woe is unto him that striveth with his Maker!" "Their way was thus hedged up with thorns."

(3.) The heart is drawn to God by the intimations of His sin-forgiving character. It is shut up by the pressure of its misery to look for help where it is convinced help alone can be found. But mere weight of affliction alone will not dispose the depraved will to accept of God as its object of supreme love. That argument goes no farther than to prove that it is impossible for the soul to keep up war with its God. The strong hand of vengeance might push back the stream of its rebellion to the fountain head, but, so soon as the hand is removed, that stream will flow on as before. Another all-important factor is needed to incline the will, freely and naturally, to submit to God as its rightful Sovereign, against whom it has rebelled. *There must be something to draw as well as to threaten.* An appeal must be made to *hopes* as well as to *fears*. There must be something to dispose the will *of itself* to go out to God without constraint. What is needed to produce that disposition of will in a guilty man, is the presentation of pardon by Him against whom sin has been committed. This is nowhere done certainly, on just grounds, and in the most soul-subduing manner, except in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Hence, "*the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ*" is an essential preparative to all true repentance. When a sinful man has set before him the warrant, on

good and certain grounds, to believe that he shall receive the pardon of all his sins as a free gift on his return to God, and also a complete renewal of the Divine love towards him, as it was before the period of his sin commenced, his obstinacy begins to give way, his heart is melted, he is drawn, he yields himself up to God in true penitence. Instantly he turns against himself, begins the work of self-condemnation, self-abhorrence, shame, and self-abasement—is full of genuine grief for the evil of his ways, spontaneously makes confession, justifies God, and condemns himself in everything, and finally sets himself to walk henceforth in ways of new obedience.

Thus the preparatives to true penitence are, partly, the conviction that sin leads to nothing but misery, and is therefore essentially evil; but principally that the God, against whom sin had been committed, instead of taking pleasure in punishing the sinner, yearns and longs to grant a complete pardon, if he would but repent and accept of the pardon, on the terms which declare God's righteousness in granting it. In the case of the Israelites, this exhibition of God's sin-forgiving character was continually set before them, in the prominent place which the institution of sacrifice had in their daily worship. It was also repeatedly confirmed as a most precious truth, in the many times that He forgave their sins in His providential dealings with them, when it would have been just to have consumed them in a moment. Indeed, their whole past history was a history of mercy. Every promise was a spring—all the facts were streams running from these springs. And one great Fountain head they had, which a thousand rivers could not exhaust, in the everlasting promise—"*I am your God!*"

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verse 9.

I. Men hope for peace in the future from their immunity in the past. These Israelites were living under the hallucination that, because, for so long a time, they had escaped from day to day manifestations of the Divine anger, therefore it would always be so, notwithstanding their systematic violations of the Divine law. They shut their ears to the emphatic condemnation which God uniformly gives of sin, and practically formed their judgments more from the peace which reigned around them in nature than from the express assurances of the Divine voice. Hence it was a great surprise to them when the punishment did actually fall.

This is common with mankind. An under-current of reasoning is ever going on in men's minds, with which the heart has more to do than the understanding, the drift of which is to bias the decisions of the latter in favour of the wishes of the former. The wish of the criminal is, that there were no day of reckoning, and the wish becomes father to the thought. The calm which now prevails around the sinner, while the bright sun shines, the birds sing, and nature chants sweet melodies in his ear—while the great forces sleep, and all things go well from day to day—all this forms a plausible ground for concluding, that what seems so like a permanent state of things will really never be altered. The men of Noah's days had lived so long in security, that they went on "*eating and drinking, buying and selling*," etc., notwithstanding all the warnings given by the "*preacher of righteousness*," "*until the day when Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came*," etc. The course of nature was so fixed that there seemed no likelihood the flood should come. "*In the last days, too, scoffers will come, saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were!'*"

Thus it is still. It is part of the "idols of the tribe." Men are warned solemnly of a coming day of putting

to the test the character they are forming now. Partly by express intimations; partly by the appearance of the Son of God in our midst, wearing our human nature; and yet more solemnly, by that mysterious death which He, the Lord of Life, passed through; and by all the solemn issues which must spring out of these facts are they warned. Yet, so accustomed are they to count on immunity from evil consequence, that they hold on in their course of unbelief, regardless of all the voices addressed to them by the God of the Gospel. "*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is set in them to do evil.*" Practically, they disbelieve in a coming judgment. "They see not the smoke of the pit, therefore they dread not the fire" Ps. lv. 19. [*South.*] They go on to-day repeating the folly of yesterday, saying, "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."

II. Men's misapprehension of the Divine silence. "*These things thou hast done and I kept silence; thou thoughtest I was altogether such an one as thyself, and did approve thy sin.*" It is singular that men should make this interpretation of the silence, when there is such ample proof passing before their eyes continually, that the time for waiting is fast coming to a close. Without intermission the arrows of death are doing their work, and every man is marked to fall. If men were but half awake, this fact could not fail to strike the dullest mind. Yet "all men think all men mortal but themselves."

Men mistake the meaning of God's delay. His own explanation is, "*the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.*"

(1.) He would give them *time* for repentance—time for the case being fully argued and leisurely weighed; also that opportunity might be afforded for their returning to God in sincere and thorough penitence.

(2.) He would show *how greatly He desires* their repentance, or how far He is from taking pleasure in their death (Ezek. xxxiii. 11).

(3.) It *has cost much to open the door* for their repentance.

(4.) He would intimate, that where there is repentance *all will yet be well.*

III. The certain approach of the day of reckoning. How can men be safe to-morrow when they sin to-day? (Rom. ii. 3.) Must they not give up sin and flee to the refuge? "*He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness,*" etc. Of those who recklessly fill up in sin their present season given for repentance, it is said "their judgment now of a long time lingereth not," etc. (2 Peter ii. 3). *Blackwell* says, "This represents vengeance as an angel of judgment pursuing incorrigible sinners on the wing, continually approaching nearer and nearer, and meanwhile keeping on them a watchful eye, that he may at length discharge an unerring blow."

"To-morrow is the wrecker's beacon, the wily snare of the destroyer;
When, unrepented, the growing avalanche of sin rolls down the easy slope,
Alas! so ponderous, and moving on in might, that a Sisyphus may not stop it."

IV. The danger of underrating the severity of the trial of the future. This people had come so to underrate the strictness of God's dealings with them when He should rise up, that they seem not to have counted on more than a moderate discipline, which they could manage to struggle through of themselves. But when the blow fell, it was insupportable, and they shrieked aloud for help. When men find that a day of final trial is coming on in the future, they set to work to abate its serious character. They form their ideas of what God will do, not so much from the intimations which He Himself makes in His Word, as from the views which they themselves form of His character. He is a Father, and the kindest of Fathers. Most true. But does the "*righteous Father*" (as the Christ expressly calls him), continue to acknowledge men as His

children after they have become *unrighteous?* And if, as the record assures us, "*there are none righteous, no, not one,*" have not all lost the privileges of children, and can only regain them by faith in Christ Jesus? Is it right—is it safe then, to suppose for a moment, that God will deal with all men as *children* merely, in the day of account, and not in their character as *impenitent sinners*—*i.e.*, all who have not reprented and believed? Must not all the impenitent stand as criminals before a judge, and be dealt with according to the laws of Eternal Righteousness? And how can these laws be properly exercised, if God does not express the terrible extent to which He hates sin? Can any punishment which fitly marks the depth of that displeasure be less than insupportably severe? Even in this world His judgments are fitted to strike men with awe. In the plagues of Egypt, the destruction of the cities of the plain, in the flood of waters let loose on an ungodly world, in the destruction of whole nations by the sword of Joshua, on account of their awful sins, we have proofs how terribly severe God's hand may become in punishing men's sins, when they obstinately cling to them and take the consequences.

More ominously still we are assured, that a day is coming on when some shall call to the rocks and the mountains—"Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!" On that day, we are told, "*the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.*" "*God shall judge the secrets of men's hearts.*" "*I will lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies,*" etc.; "*the rains shall descend, the floods come, and the winds blow and beat against that house,*" etc. "*He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy. Of how much soever punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing,*" etc. "*Whoso was not found written in the Book of Life, was cast into the lake of fire.*"

These statements, however interpreted, prove unmistakably how terrible unsafe it is to underrate the strictness of the standard by which God will try men's characters in the day of final account. As yet the hour has not come for weighing men in the strictest balances. At most we have but the breezes and the gales here, and many dream we shall never have more. Hereafter we are assured in God's Word the hurricanes shall be awakened, and the most thorough test applied to the stability of the foundation on which every man is building. Blessed shall they be who shall then be found to have prepared for the worst, and to have fled for refuge to Him "*who is able to save unto the uttermost those that come unto God by Him.*"

V. The wisdom of preparing for the strictest possible trial. The common difficulties of life are generally not greater than a brave heart and strong will may surmount, without any special helping hand; though the Christian will "in everything by prayer and supplication make his request known unto God." That, however, is but to "run with the footmen;" how different to "contend with the horses!" There are times even in this life when trials come to the most intrepid with overmastering force, when the man is lifted off his feet, and feels borne irresistibly as a straw on the surface of the torrent. For such seasons he needs the help of an arm stronger than his own. And there are also days of "fiery trial," where there is no effectual succour all round, save that which is supplied by Him who is "mighty to save!"

But for every man a day is coming on in the future, when his character shall be "sifted as wheat" and "tried as fire"—when he shall become a helpless thing in the hands of infinite forces. What he needs at that dread moment, is the means of meeting every possible contingency—a refuge which can give shelter from the fiercest pos-

sible wind that can blow—a fire-escape from the most awful possible conflagration that can burn—a sum which shall meet to the full the largest debt which the messengers of justice can possibly exact. Literally, every man, as a responsible being, will then have to answer all that the Divine perfections can claim of allegiance to the Divine throne—all that love, reverence, purity of character, and obedience of life, which is justly due from a creature made after the image of God. In that hour when God shall decide the final relation in which He is to stand for ever to His creature, His full character shall be revealed in all its aspects—no perfections obscured, but all revealed as they are. What is naturally and properly due from the creature to the Creator must be exacted in full—not more, not less. How much that may imply may be judged of from the fact, that every man is bound to "love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind," every moment of his being. "How shall I know when I have done enough?" exclaimed Dr. Johnson, when looking at the question of God's claims on the heart, with the light of eternity breaking in upon him!

VI. An all-sufficient refuge we have set before us. In the Person of "the Christ of God"—the God-man, we behold one who, on our behalf, fulfils that "righteousness which is very high," and renders perfect obedience to that "commandment which is exceeding broad"—one who "magnifies the law (under which we are placed) and makes it honourable." Placed under that law in our room by the Lawgiver Himself, He meets all its claims according to the loftiest ideas of what is due from responsible subjects, in the presence of the holy and righteous God. Cordially accepting this refuge, no man in the history of our fallen race, need be afraid how high the claims of eternal righteousness, may rise before him. Thus protected, he dwells in absolute security amid the full blaze of the Divine perfections before him. Once united to Christ, all possible foundation for farther charges against a sinner is for ever taken away. No claim of the Divine law can ever rise higher than that fulfilment which has been given by His glorious substitute. "*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*" "*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.*"

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 9–11.

VI. The Divine deliverance and the human instrumentality.

Here we have—

I. The state of mind to which God grants deliverance. This is all-important. All God's promises are made to those who bear a certain character, or who approach Him in a fit state of mind. The account given here is very abbreviated, but two features are implied in the attitude of the people "when they cried unto the Lord." They showed—

1. Sorrow for the past. This we may fairly suppose if we are to judge from the fact, that no mention is made of their openly sinning any more for the next forty years. Also, we could hardly suppose, that God would have vouchsafed to deliver them now, had they not repented. Besides when it is said that Othniel judged Israel, surely one of his first duties would be to cleanse the land of its idolatry. Further, when, on a similar occasion, they cried to God for deliverance (ch. x. 10–15), they made unreserved confession of having forsaken their God and worshipped Balaam. They also put away their strange gods, and that with

shame and sorrow. May we not suppose, the same was done here. In the days of Samuel, after several years of sin, we are told that all at once, "*the whole house of Israel lamented after the Lord.*" (1 Sam. vii. 2.) Very likely the hidden cause of this revival was the prophet's prayers. (James v. 16.) *Patrick* says also, that "Samuel's reproofs and instructions, along with the representation he would make of their sin, had touched their hearts." This also was followed by their putting away their sin.

This God always requires. "True penitence consists in the heart being broken both *for* sin and *from* sin." There must be self-condemnation, and an acknowledgment that God is righteous. The sorrow arises, not merely from the sad experience of the calamities, in which sin involves the sinner, but especially from a sense of guilt in rebelling against God, disobeying his commands, acting ungratefully by His manifold mercies and favours, and spending life in entire neglect of His claims, and even of His presence. What need for sorrow, bitter and poignant, at the remembrance of so much sin in the past! It robs God; ruins the soul; and necessitates the death of Christ ere it can "be made an end of." The sins of these Israelites called for sorrow. They had renounced the most sacred obligations, they had despised the most bountiful of benefactors, and they had trampled under foot the most "holy, just, and excellent" of all laws. Their high calling was to "*shine as lights in the world.*" Yet, for many years, that light had been eclipsed, and the conduct of these sons of Jacob, instead of being quoted as a reason why the heathen should turn from their idol-worship, to the service of the living God, had become the most powerful reason in the world to justify them in going on their sinful course, and banishing the thought of the God of Israel from the earth. "It is sad when a Christian becomes the chief argument against Christianity." [*South.*]

2. All their trust was in prayer to God as their own God. In returning to Jehovah they virtually confessed their error in making idols their confidence. They now anew acknowledged Him to be the only true God, and implored His forgiveness in earnest prayer. This was both faith and repentance, "without which it is impossible to please God." The heart must rest on God alone as its essential good. It must acknowledge Him, trust in Him, and give Him the homage due from the creature to the Creator. Faith looks to God alone for its portion, and makes Him its all in all. It takes Him as He describes Himself to be, believes Him to be all that He declares Himself to be, and trusts Him accordingly. The most perfect revelation of God ever made, is that which is exhibited in the gospel of His Son; and this the people of Israel had in a rudimentary form, in the Mosaic system that was established among them.

II. God's readiness to give relief.

It ought never to be forgotten, that the great end of all God's dealings with this people was, to illustrate the excellence of His own character in that view of it, which is expressed by the phrase, "*Mercy rejoiceth against judgment*" (Isa. xliii. 21). Hence such things are brought prominently before us as these:—His bearing with sin, while yet He shows intense hatred towards it; His restraining its outbreaks on the one hand, while yet there is no infringement of liberty, on the other; His condemning it, and yet His forgiving it; and here, His readiness to deliver from its consequences.

1. He gives relief where there is the appearance of penitence. Even where the reality may not actually exist. Some, perhaps, a considerable number of the people, may at this time have become true penitents, but it is probable that the majority merely assumed a penitent attitude, because driven to it through force of circumstances, while there was no real forsaking of sin in the heart. God says of the men of Hosea's days, "*I have hewed them by the prophets, I*

have slain them by the words of my mouth. Yet they did not cry to me with their heart (in prayer); *they but howled upon their beds.*" But though many may not have been true penitents, simply because there was the appearance of it, God raises up a deliverer. So it was with Ahab; when he humbled himself, God said, "*I will not bring the evil in his day but in the days of his sons*" (1 Kings xxi. 27–29). This shows God's extreme readiness to meet the sinner in mercy, so soon as that which obstructs the way is removed. He virtually says. Let sin be but confessed and abandoned, and the Divine mercy, will flow forth. If penitence is not real but only seeming, He often gives some blessings, to show how ready He is to go the full length, when it can be done consistently with His character. Such blessings, indeed, are but temporal and partial. Spiritual blessings, implying true and proper forgiveness, with the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, are only given when the sinner really "turns from sin to God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after new obedience," Yet repentance alone does not *entitle* any sinner to forgiveness; it only *qualifies* for it. The title comes through faith in Christ.

2. He allows no earnest cry to go long without relief. It is not probable that they began to cry to God in penitence as soon as they were afflicted. It is more likely that towards the end of the eight years, after trying all other expedients, they at last gave up the controversy with God and laid down their weapons of rebellion. Probably they had not long to wait after their cry became earnest and general throughout the land, ere He responded and granted them relief. This is God's usual manner. When it became manifest that the prodigal's penitence was quite sincere, "*the father ran, embraced him,*" etc. Yet not at the very first moment when the cry of penitence is raised, does God answer. There are reasons for some delay—reasons of wisdom and propriety, why the petitioner should be allowed to cry for some time. To be convinced how extremely far he is from deserving it—how much of a miracle of grace it is that he should receive it at all—that he may have time to consider how long-continued, how deep and aggravated, have been his provocations—that he may have opportunity of showing the sincerity and the earnestness of his repentance—and especially that he may have it rivetted on his heart that he owes his deliverance solely to the grace of God through the atoning merits of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Yet it must not be supposed that some time must needs elapse before God *becomes willing* to grant relief. His willingness may be counted on as instantaneous on a sinner's really repenting of his sin. His mercy is *active* not *passive*. It is disposed to move of itself, without waiting for motives to induce it to act. The spontaneous outgoing of God's nature to His creatures is to be merciful, or good, where there is no obstruction in the way. "The Lord is good unto all and His tender mercies are over all His works." Reasons of wisdom and justice permitting, He lingers not for a moment but hastens to the sinner's relief.

III. The instrumentality made use of in giving deliverance.

1. The instrument chosen was a man like themselves.

(a) No angel was sent down from heaven, as at the slaying of the first-born in Egypt, or at the destruction of the Assyrian army. Neither was an army brought from the West, to fight the host which had descended from the East, against which Israel had no power. Nor was any excercise of miraculous power alone made use of, such as an earthquake, or famine, or pestilence.

(b) But one of themselves is raised up, and is held as a rod in the hand of omnipotence, and so the work is done. God finds the instrument on the spot. He does not need to go to other camps to obtain that which is suited to His purpose. The humblest of the men of Israel, he could make sufficient for the

task should He so determine. He is never at a loss for instruments—"babes and sucklings" praise Him in His temple; a little captive maid glorifies His name before a heathen court; a malefactor in the jaws of death illustrates the wonders of His redeeming grace; a forgotten prisoner hid out of sight from all the world, comes forth at the proper moment to furnish sustenance for a famishing world; and unlearned fishermen are taken from their nets to herald the message of pardon to a whole sinning world, through the blood shed on Calvary.

(c) But here there is a deeper reason why the deliverer should be a man like themselves. The sons of Israel were a Messianic people, and all God's manner of dealing with them was intended to foreshadow the Messiah. He came *in human form* to act the part of a Saviour. "He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him that of the seed of Abraham." In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren. "And forasmuch as they were partakers of flesh and blood, He in like manner took part of the same." "There is one Mediator between God and man—the man Christ Jesus."

2. The selection is made by God Himself. It was not left to the vote of the people. It was not with Israel, as with any other nation.

(*a*) *They were, in a peculiar sense, His own people.* He was their king. Their laws and all their arrangements came from Him, and especially everything connected with their salvation, and their advancement to honour and privilege was His gift. They were His diamonds, and no hand was allowed to touch them but His own.

(*b*) *Besides it was not an ordinary ruler that was now needed.* A King or a Magistrate to administer civil or social or national law. But a special work was to be done. A salvation was to be wrought from a ruin brought on the people by their sins; and the means of accomplishing that salvation was not the ordinary weapons used in war. The victory to be gained did not depend on the weapons used, but on the manner *in* which, or the principles *on* which the war was waged. It was to be seen by all as a special work of God, wrought out through means of God's own providing. Hence the man chosen to be a *saviour* was specially selected by God.

(*c*) *And he was to be successful in his work, not from his own natural gifts, but through special qualifications conferred on him by God,* and through the special co-operation of the Providence of God in bringing out the result. Everything was special, and everything was sacred; hence the selection must be God's own. For this same reason no vote of the people was taken in the choice of any of the other judges or saviours mentioned in this book. This selection of a saviour for the people by God Himself is a peculiarly Messianic idea. Isa. xlii. 1., etc.; Gal. iv. 4., etc.; 1 John iv. 14.

3. One man only is employed. He was not, indeed, to fight alone, but to put himself at the head of such a number of the people as could be got together to make head against the enemy. Yet all depended on the leader. He was to be the mainspring of the movement. He had to show a courage and resources equal to the occasion. He had to inspire others with an enthusiasm similar to his own. He was to be the rallying point, the vehicle through which all the energy should flow, and the guide to conduct the whole enterprise, from first to last.

How often does the history of a whole people, or even of an age, take its complexion from the doings of one man! What a blank there would have been in the history of Abraham's day, had that one good man been removed from his place! It would have been like removing a solitary star of the first magnitude from the spiritual heavens; or had Moses been removed in his day how differently should we have read the history of Israel! And if Elijah and Elisha had not stood forward in their places in their day, we should have lost some of the

brightest pages of Old Testament history. Deeper still would have been the eclipse, if David, the sweet singer of Israel, had not arisen, and the man after God's own heart had not sat on the throne of Israel. The names of Isaiah and Jeremiah among the prophets, and of Peter, John and Paul among the apostles, are surrounded with such sacred yet stirring associations, that had their places remained empty, it would have been equivalent to leaving out the most glowing and most thrilling portions of the Book of God, and shutting up nearly all the wells' mouths, whence refreshing draughts of water of life are supplied to weary pilgrims, as they pass on to the heavenly Canaan.

IV. The suitableness of the individual chosen.

1. God ever chooses the fittest instruments for doing His work. The hour had come and the man appears. He does not despise men's natural gifts, when they are found possessed in greater measure by some than by others. For, with these gifts He Himself has endowed the possessors. And when He requires an instrument to do His work, He chooses those whom He has already best qualified for serving His purpose. It is when men become proud of their gifts, and begin to forget the Giver, that they and their gifts together are condemned (Jer. ix. 23, 24; Ex. ix. 11; Isa. x. 12, 13; 1 Cor. i. 19–21, 27, 28, 29; iii. 18–20; Dan. iv. 30–34). Natural gifts, however, are not slighted by the Giver of "every good and perfect gift," but are employed when they are suited to the end required; beyond that when special qualifications are needed they are specially supplied. Examples we have in Moses, David, and Paul.

2. The qualifications of the instrument employed. On making enquiry as to the man whom God had selected "to make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before Him for the land," we are agreeably surprised to find that degenerate Israel could produce such a man as "Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother." The phrase "son of Kenaz," means simply—of the stock, or family line of Kenaz, and is equivalent to the appellation—"Kenezite" (Josh. xiv. 6; xv. 17; Jud. i. 13). Othniel had many elements of fitness:—

(1) **He was naturally brave.** Names in those days were often significant of character, and if we are to judge by this criterion, Othniel, "the lion of God," must have stood among the foremost for natural courage. As a matter of fact, he had the reputation of being a hero all through his past history.

(2) **He belonged to an honoured family.** He was of the house of Caleb, than which name none stood higher among all the genealogies of the chosen people. Now that Caleb himself was gone, no fitter man could have been selected as a centre around which the tribes might rally, and especially the tribe of Judah, to which the elected "judge" belonged. None would dispute his ascendency, or refuse to follow his lead. He was just the man in whom the people would place confidence. The aroma of the name was still felt through all Israel, though two generations had elapsed since it first became famous.

(3) **He had a long experience.** He was not a young man, with the flush and ardour natural to youth, and ready to attempt great exploits. However valuable may be the elasticity and enthusiasm of growing years, no qualities are so much required for the leader of a great and difficult enterprise as those which are expressed in the phrase—a large experience. Othniel was now a veteran, probably as old as his brother (or kinsman) Caleb was on the day when at the term of 85 years of age, he set himself with undiminished vigour to expel the men of the giant race from their native strongholds (Josh. xiv. 11, 12). The spirit of Caleb still survived in Othniel. Both instances forcibly illustrated the truth of the promises before they were given, "They that wait on the Lord shall gather fresh vigour; they shall show a strength of wing like the eagle; they shall run and not be weary, and walk and not faint." On ordinary and extraordinary occasions

alike, they shall be adequate in strength to undertake whatever falls to them in the way of duty to do. The language of their God is "Even to old age I am He, and to hoar hairs will I carry you."

(4) He was eminently a man of God. He appears to have been one of those noble men of true moral greatness, who do not go with the tide of public opinion, or "follow a multitude to do evil," but stand fast like a rock to the cause of their God, prepared to stand with a small minority, or altogether alone, if that were necessary, rather than swerve from fidelity to the principles of truth and righteousness. To his eye Israel's weakness did not consist in lack of men of arms, or of martial valour, but in a low condition of piety towards their God. Doubtless "his heart trembled for the ark of God," when he beheld the tide of apostasy all but universal over the land, and his place would generally be found among "those who feared the Lord and spake often one to another—being deeply concerned for the honour of his name." The honour of his God was dearer to him than all things else. For this he was prepared to go through fire and water. For this he would fight against any odds. Where the honour of that name was concerned, he was not afraid though a whole troop of Chushans were in the field. "His heart was fixed trusting in the Lord." Life was indeed precious, but that he would cheerfully hazard a hundred times to redeem the hallowed name of his God, which had so long been vilely profaned on all the coasts of Israel. It was not personal valour in which he trusted; man of strong arm and strong heart though he was, he would spend much of his time in secret "sighing and crying for all the abominations done in the midst of the land." In secret he had thus honoured God, and now before all Israel God honoured him.

(5) He was specially a man of great faith.

(a) Importance of Faith. To faith, more than to any other feature of character, does God have respect in granting success. "By faith the elders, one and all, obtained a good report;" and "without faith it is impossible to please God." He had learned long ago the science of the "wars of Canaan," namely, that all victory came through *faith* in the God of the covenant, and all defeat happened through *unbelief*, and *departure from the living God.*

(b) Character of Faith. Faith begins with giving up self, and looking to God alone. It says self is nothing, but God is all in all. It takes God's own account of Himself as the true account, believes that all his perfections are as He describes them, and that in everything in which we have to do with Him, He is to be absolutely trusted both as a Father and a Sovereign Ruler. It believes that all the requirements of His law upon us are just and reasonable, that all the principles of His moral government are righteous and true, that He has an unquestioned right to appoint our lot in this world, being His creatures, that we are responsible to Him at all times, and that whatever mystery may hang over his dealings with us in this world, He will always act by us according to the acknowledged principles of His character. It believes all His declarations, takes all His promises as trustworthy, and resigns itself implicitly to His arrangements.

(c) Its foundation. Its great strength lies in the *foundation* on which it rests. Being guilty we dare not trust God for anything, but a great Redeemer is provided, "in whom we are brought nigh unto God," and "in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen." To the ancient Israelite, the Messiah, or Abraham's promised seed, was the channel through whom all the blessings wrapped up in the covenant, ("I will be a God to you") were to flow out to all the families of the earth. Assurance of preservation at the line of duty was one of the details of this all embracive covenant of blessing. A man like Othniel, who walked daily with his God, would be able to apply this great genuine promise of the covenant to all the details of duty in practical life. Thus his faith rested on the express testimony of Jehovah in the covenant, and on the provisions

made for ratifying that covenant by the institution of sacrifice. All his past experience as a man of piety, and all that he knew of the history of his people, would be as so many confirmations of this grand fundamental promise on which his faith rested.

(6) **He had a brilliant name in the history of the past.** The storming of Debir was not yet forgotton. Its capture was one of the proudest stories of the heroic age of Joshua. Then the name of Othniel rose as a star of the first magnitude in Israel's sky. But as in every victory gained through faith, the victor ascribed all the glory to that God who had "covered his head in the day of battle." His language virtually was "By thee I have run through a troop, by my God have I leaped over a wall."

(a) Debir's importance. In the history of that period of conquest, which is so briefly given, and where so many things are left out, the subjugation of Debir receives a special prominence. It belonged to the hill country, and was inhabited by the "Amorites," who were the "highlanders" of Canaan—and probably those very Anakim at whose presence the spies who were sent out from Kadesh some 38 years before to search out the land, were so much scared. It was one of the cities of the giants, and seems to have been one of the most difficult of them all to subdue. After Caleb had driven the natives from all the other strongholds, he paused on coming to Debir, and offered a special reward to the man who would undertake to reduce it. Its other names may shed a little light on this point. It was called "Kirjathsannah" (Josh. xv. 49), which signifies "*the city of instruction*," and "Kirjath-sepher," (Josh. xv. 15, 16) which means "*the city of books.*" It is supposed to have been *the city of law*, where the national records were kept, and perhaps was a seat of learning among the Canaanites. It is farther confirmatory of this view, that the word "Debir" signifies *oracle*. Here probably were treasured up the archives of these nations, such as they were. For we know that the Phœnicians, and probably too the other Canaanitish nations, were among the first in the world to possess a knowledge of letters. It is not so surprising then to hear of *the book-city*, though the art of printing was entirely unknown. A very few books would suffice in those days to justify a town taking to itself such a name. The few books there were however would be esteemed very precious. It would be equivalent to their *bank of knowledge* where would be laid up all the treasures of knowledge, or learning they had at that early date been able to acquire, on such subjects as history and science, the useful and the fine arts, languages, archæology and astronomy, all of which, though of the rudest kind, would be regarded as valuable by the age itself. Here as in a *bank-safe* were these treasures collected, which would give to that town an unusual measure of importance above the other towns; so that it might be expected to be doubly fortified, and rendered quite impregnable.

(b) Its conquest by Othniel. He was the man found with sufficient confidence in his God, to scale the walls, batter down the gates, and put all the men of might to the sword. "In the name of his God he set up his banner," and could say in the face of the enemy, "why do ye heathen rage against the God of Jacob? and ye people of the giant city, why do ye imagine a vain thing?"

V. The Spirit of God the source of all real qualification for sacred duties. "*The Spirit of the Lord came upon him.*" There needs not more to raise a man to the height of an angel of the Lord, or to lift up a people groaning under the heel of oppression to become "more than conquerers."

1. The Spirit of God is the source of life in nature. In the widest sense He is the source of all power and of all life whatever. When life began to exist in the world, the Spirit of God was moving, or brooding dove-like on the face of

the waters—the chaotic mass. It was by His agency that all the laws of the natural world were at first established, and it is by Him they still hold on their course. All man's natural faculties, both of body and mind, are endowments of the Holy Spirit. These operations may be said to be in the line of natural law. But there are gifts of a much higher order.

2. He is the source of the special gifts of the kingdom of grace. There is a dispensation of grace as distinct from the reign of natural law. The gifts of that dispensation are spiritual in character, pertaining as they do to the dispositions and relations of the heart towards its God. They are such as faith, repentance, love, and all the elements of a new religious character which a man comes to possess when he is "born of the Spirit," and so enters what Christ calls "the kingdom of God." This class of gifts, though offered to all men, are yet bestowed only on those who comply with the call to receive them on the terms offered.

3. He is the source of the supernatural gifts conferred. God sometimes confers powers on men so as to raise them above their natural level, by which they come to *know* what in the natural exercise of their understanding they could never reach, and come to have *strength* to perform what, by the natural exercise of their physical faculties, they could never accomplish. These high and peculiar gifts, usually called *supernatural gifts*, were conferred only on those who were called to do some special work for God, such as Apostles and Prophets—those who were commissioned to make some special revelation of the mind and will of God, or who were empowered to work miracles, or who were called to perform duties that required qualifications above the natural standard. Of this latter class were "the Judges," a special class of *saviours*," (Neh. ix. 27), who were raised up to meet a particular conjuncture of circumstances, when the cause of God was greatly imperilled, when the church of God seemed almost destroyed, and when the tide of sin like a vast flood was overrunning the land. In these times there was special need for the Spirit to be given.

4. Both the gracious and supernatural gifts of the Spirit were conferred on special grounds It is of the highest importance to notice *the grounds* on which the gifts were conferred, and the purpose for which they were given. The gifts referred to were all given under—

(*a*) A *special dispensation*—a dispensation of grace, and not in natural course. They were conferred in connection with the great scheme of mercy, which God from the beginning has had in store for sinful men through the Mediator, and which is gradually developed in the history of His church.

(*b*) *The gracious gifts*, along with pardon of sins, and acceptance with God, constitute the blessings of salvation which that scheme presents, and, as a seal, mark the happy recipients as saved ones.

(*c*) *The supernatural gifts*, though *usually* (not *always*, *e.g.*, *Judas*, *Balaam* and Matt. vii. 22, 23), conferred on the saved, are not conferred for the purpose of saving their possessors, but for the purpose either of revealing some part of the remedial scheme, of attesting its Divine character, or of preserving and sustaining it under all emergencies. In no other connection have the influences of the Holy Spirit, for purposes of human salvation been given at any time except through the remedial scheme, *i.e.*, through Christ in some form, and always on the footing of *grace*, or the special and free favour of God.

(*d*) It was *because there was a church in Israel, and a scheme of salvation by grace*, having its development in the dispensation that was planted among them, that God gave His Spirit to assist in the furtherance of the interests of that scheme. The people of the Messiah, and of whom He was to come, must be

preserved when in danger; there must be no overthrow of the sacred system of rites and ceremonies, laws and ordinances, which God had established among them to prefigure the work of the Messiah, while the religious worship and religious privileges of His own appointment must be continued from age to age, and to enable those who were raised up to be the "*saviours*" (Neh. ix. 27) of the people to fulfil their high vocation, the Spirit of the Lord came upon them in a supernatural way. The Spirit was given out of regard to the covenant ("I will be your God,") which was ratified by the coming of the Messiah.

VI. **The special qualifications conferred on Othniel through the Spirit.** Generally speaking they were conferred on him in such measure as to fit him in all respects to be not only the leader, but the saviour, of Israel in this emergency. He was not only qualified to direct the movement, but was furnished with every requisite necessary to ensure the complete liberation of his country.

1. **He was consecrated to the office of a saviour by the Spirit.** It set him apart from a common to a sacred purpose. He became by it "the Lord's anointed." When the prophet Samuel, by God's direction, anointed Saul to be king over Israel, he poured a vial of oil over his head (1 Sam. x. 1). And, again, he anointed David to be king, with a horn of oil (1 Sam. xvi. 12, 13). In both cases it was the same method, the only difference being that a *vial* was used in Saul's case—a brittle vessel, and easily broken—emblematic of the after events of the history; whereas a *horn* was used in anointing David, indicating strength and durability of the kingly power. The oil was emblematic of the Holy Spirit's influence, signifying that God had called the person to the office, and would qualify him sufficiently for the discharge of its duties. Accordingly, we are told, that after the anointing, the Spirit of the Lord came first on Saul, and afterwards on David—not in His *gracious* influences, for the personal salvation of the possessor, but to qualify for the duties of a sacred office, held for the good of God's Church. Also, when Aaron and his sons were consecrated to the priestly offices, the holy anointing oil was poured on their heads. The Christ Himself was so anointed with the Holy Spirit (Isa. lxi. 1; Ps. xlv. 7; Acts x. 38). All true Christians are reckoned anointed ones, because the Spirit of Christ is conferred on them all (John i. 16; 2 Cor. i. 21, 22; 1 John ii. 20, 27; Rev. iii. 18).

This was the best of all evidences that God had called him to the work before him, both for Othniel himself, and for all the people round about him. It was impossible after this to doubt that a great purpose was to be accomplished, and was to be accomplished through his instrumentality. It was the Lord Himself indicating His choice of an instrument.

2. **He felt that all his natural gifts were strengthened in an extraordinary degree.** His courage was now truly up to the lion pitch. He could say with simple truth, "Though an host encamp against me, yet will I not fear." "If mine enemies should compass me about like bees, they shall be quenched as the fire of thorns. In the name of the Lord I will destroy them." He felt his physical vigour so increased that he was prepared, though but one man, to go against a thousand. His knowledge of men, his skill and tact in making arrangements, his fertility of resources, his capacity for conducting great undertakings, he felt to be all so wonderfully increased, that all difficulties melted away before him, and he felt himself on all sides equal to the occasion. Great mental energy, power of practical endurance, and zeal for God's honour, were also added, along with a self-denial that could go through any amount of hardship, and a willingness to risk life itself in the holy cause of his God! It was thus that "the Spirit of the Lord stirred him" (chap. xiii. 25).

3. He became fully conscious that God was with him. It was not merely a persuasion, but a knowledge—an act of direct consciousness that omnipotence itself was on his side. He felt that an infinite force was at his back, which nothing could withstand. Nay, he felt that this force was acting through him as its organ. He knew from personally feeling it, that God was in possession of his spirit, and could no more doubt that He was acting with him in every thing he did, than that when he put forth an act of his will, he knew his arm would be moved by that act of will. He acted, indeed, in the full blaze of the consciousness that Omnipotence was on his side, and that all obstructions must give way as certainly as that matter is moved this way or that by a law of nature—or by that Omnific word which at first brought all matter into existence.

4. His faith became very strong. It rose at once to be a faith of assurance. There was not a single admixture of doubt. He believed that God's own glory was concerned in the matter; that His faithfulness could not fail, and that He must show Himself jealous on behalf of His people according to His engagements. He also strongly believed that God had but to show Himself, and His enemies would be scattered. "As smoke is driven before the wind, or as wax is melted at the touch of fire." His trust was unshaken in the character of the God of Jacob, and in the gracious promises He had made to the people with whom He had entered into covenant. When he went out to meet the enemy, he went with the absolute assurance of victory, as if it were already an historical fact. He knew he could not possibly fail.

5. In all things he was instructed by Jehovah Himself. The Spirit of the Lord prompted him in all his plans and arrangements, so that nothing could fall out amiss. "The Lord ordered the battle." His hand was at the helm of the movement.

VII. The ease with which he conquered. When the Lord delivered Chushan into his hand, the issue was not doubtful, nor was it long in suspense. He who has all hearts in His hand, and all events at His disposal, can always make victory easy for those whom He loves. The Divine Spirit wrought to secure the result; not only by qualifying the instrument chosen to do the work, but also by over-ruling all the circumstances of Providence to bring out the desired result. This was the case in all the wars of Joshua, and it was the case now.

1. Means. Sometimes the enemy were made to feel faint-hearted in the midst of the fight while Israel waxed valiant in the battle. Sometimes a panic was made to prevail throughout the ranks (Duet. ii. 25; Josh. ii. 9, 24). Sometimes "hornets," or stinging insects were made to fly in whole clouds in the face of the enemy, so that victory became easy (Josh. xxiv. 12). At other times God turned every man's sword against his fellow (chap. vii. 22; 1 Sam. xiv. 15, 20). Again He sends a spirit of confusion or bitter enmity against each other into the camp of the enemy (2 Chron. xx. 22, 23). And sometimes he rolls down great stones from heaven on those who would seek to destroy His people (chap. x 11). All the circumstances connected with the position of the two parties concerned, were fully known to God, and also all the causes that could possibly have to do with bringing out the issue of the struggle. And we are told in few words, "The Lord delivered Chushan into the hand of Othniel, and his hand prevailed against him."

2. Ways and means are easily found when the moral purposes have been served. When the people became penitent there no longer remained any difficulty in effecting deliverance. The "Strength of Israel" could give victory this way or that way, as it might seem good to Him. He has but to will it, and the weak shall become strong, or the strong weak. All these eight years

there was no difficulty with Him to grant release from the oppressor's grasp, at any hour. He might at any moment have said to the raging storm, "Peace! be still! and there should have been a great calm." But high moral purposes required to be wrought out. His people must be taught the true character of a service of sin—that the "ways of transgressors are hard"—"that the end of these ways is death"—and that "it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake the fountain of living waters." They required to know by experience the treachery of their hearts, the ingratitude of their ways, and the grievous folly of their apostacy. They must be made to understand that though "God is merciful and gracious and long-suffering, He is yet so holy that He cannot by any means clear the guilty." These lessons being taught, He was ready at a moment's notice to arise and show Himself as "the Lord of hosts, strong and mighty in battle."

VIII. **The long peace after so much trouble.** "The land had rest forty years."

1. **The elements of disturbance in the atmosphere were completely cleared away.** Such rout was given to Chushan, that it was manifest to the nations that the God of Israel had again come to the help of His people; and His "fear was upon them," so that they did not dare to attack a people that were surrounded on every side by such invisible strength.

2. **The people in general had become penitent.** The worship of Jehovah was resumed, and probably the idols were all removed.

3. **Righteousness again prevailed throughout society.** This is always the basis of peace, as sin is always the fountain head of trouble. There are ever two broad features in the Divine character—mercy and righteousness. And in any instrument raised up to do a work of God in His Providence, the reflection of these features is seen in the duties given him to discharge. "The judge" in Israel was charged not only with the duty of working salvation, but also with that of establishing the reign of righteousness among the people. This, we believe, included not only the administration of civil justice as between man and man, but also a supervision of the practical observance of those laws and ordinances which God had laid down as rules of righteousness for the life of His people. "Peace flows like a river" in a land, when its "righteousness is strong like the waves of the sea."

The "forty years" we regard as commencing with the deliverance wrought, and terminating with the beginning of the next chapter of oppression. Whether Othniel died during the forty years, or at their expiry, we cannot tell. The long continuance of peace, and the short term of oppression, show what delight God has in making His goodness go forth to His people, and how extremely reluctant He is to visit them with the rod.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verse 10.

The Holy Spirit, the one Source of all Spiritual Blessing.

"The Judges," or "saviours" of the church and people of God, had extraordinary duties assigned them to do, for which qualifications above the natural standard were required. Hence their need of what we usually call the supernatural influences of the Divine Spirit; for He is the fountain-head of all real wisdom and strength. But every man who becomes a true Christian needs the Holy Spirit both to begin this new life in him and to carry it on.

Eternal life is the gift of God the Father; it is manifested in God the Son; and it is enjoyed only through the influences of God the Spirit. God the Father reveals Himself by the Son; and the Son reveals Himself through the Spirit. The Spirit is to Christ what the atmosphere is to the sun—without it His glory would not be revealed, and He would shine in vain—Christ procures eternal life, and the Holy Spirit applies it. The presence and work of the Holy Spirit are equally necessary to the enjoyment of the blessings of salvation, as those of the Father and the Son.

I. The nature of the Divine Spirit's influence. "In enlightening the mind it is not the office of the Spirit to give new revelations; nor yet does He discover to us mysteries and recondite meanings of scripture. But it is clear from scripture statement, that, until a man have the Spirit of God to instruct him, he cannot "discern" the excellence of spiritual things (1. Cor. ii. 14). The man who has great perspicacity in matters of science, may be stone blind in religion.

"No words however carefully selected could make a man who had been born blind form an idea of light. But those who are taught of the Spirit "behold with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, and are changed into His image," through the influence of what they are made to discern. Such a manifestation is made of the excellence of the truth of the gospel, as awakens a train of feelings and affections, that were never experienced before. The same words of scripture had often been read before, but without any emotion. Now they possess a loving virtue which penetrates into the inmost recesses of the soul, and fill it with light, and love, and hope, and activity. A similar change would take place if a man of gross mind were suddenly inspired with those refined perceptions, and that delicate sensibility, which are the foundation of taste. A new light would be poured on the face of nature. The scenery at which he looked with languid eye, would present features of sublimity and beauty. Where formerly there was nothing but dull, uninteresting irregularity, he now discovers order, proportion, harmony, and grace."

[*Dick.*]

"He does not make us wise above that which is written, but makes us wise up to that which is written. He does not tell us anything that is out of the record; but all that is in it, He sends home with clearness and effect on the mind. When a telescope is directed to some distant landscape it enables us to see what we could not otherwise have seen; but it does not enable us to see anything which has not a real existence in the prospect before us. It does not present to the eye any fanciful or fictitious scene. The natural eye saw nothing but blue land, stretching along the distant horizon. By the aid of the glass, there bursts upon it a charming variety of fields and woods, and spires and villages. Yet the glass has not added one feature to the assemblage.

So of the Spirit, He does not add a single truth, nor a single character to the book of Revelations. He simply enables the 'spiritual man' to see what the 'natural man' cannot see."

[*Chalmers.*]

II. Fullness of blessing which the Spirit gives. "The one comprehensive work of the Spirit is to *illustrate Christ*—Christ in His person—offices—and work—and through Christ to show the evil of sin, to exhibit the glory of the righteous character of God, and to undo thoroughly the work of Satan (John xvi. 8–11). 'He convinces of sin and misery, enlightens the mind in the knowledge of Christ, renews the will, and persuades and enables to embrace Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel.' He brings a man into a *new state;* gives him *new views* of himself, of God, of sin, of salvation; leads him to choose *new objects of affection;* induces him to cherish *new desires and aims;* causes him to experience *new enjoyments;* leads him to form *new*

habits; and stirs him up to begin a *new conflict* in his soul, a conflict not only between sin and the conscience, but between sin and the will."

[*Buchanan.*]

"The Spirit, as '*water*' cleanses, fertilises, refreshes, is abundant, and is freely given. As '*fire*' it purifies, illuminates, and searches. As '*wind*' it is independent, sovereign, powerful, sensible in its effects, reviving. As '*oil*' it heals, comforts, illuminates, consecrates. As '*rain* and *dew*,' it fertilises, refreshes, is abundant, imperceptible, and penetrating. As a '*dove*' it is gentle, meek, innocent, forgiving. As a '*voice*' it speaks, guides, warns, and teaches. As a '*seal*' it impresses, secures, and authenticates. [*Anon.*]

"It is called the 'Comforter;' the 'Free Spirit;' the 'Good Spirit;' the 'Holy Spirit;' the 'Holy Spirit of Promise;' the 'Power of the Highest;' the 'Spirit of the Lord God;' the 'Spirit of the Father;' the 'Spirit of Christ;' the 'Spirit of the Son;' the 'Spirit of Life—grace—truth—prophecy—adoption wisdom—counsel—wisdom—might—understanding—glory—knowledge—fear of the Lord—holinesss—revelation;!' 'Seven Spirits of God;' 'Voice of the Lord.'" [*Anon.*]

III. The Spirit needed by every man.

1. On whom he is conferred. "As we press our seals, not on air or water, but on materials capable of receiving the characters, so the Holy Spirit of God is only given to really believing minds capable of receiving and preserving his seal." [*Jean Claude.*]

2. He sets free. "To know the way to heaven, sometimes to cast a longing eye in that direction, and by fits and starts to make a feeble effort heavenwards, can end in nothing. We must get the Spirit of God. Thus only can we get free of the shackles that bind the soul to earth, to the flesh, and sin. I have seen a captive eagle, caged far from its distant home, as he sat mournful-like on his perch, turn his eye sometimes heavenwards; there he would sit in silence like one wrapt in thought, gazing through the bars of his cage up into the blue sky; and, after a while, as if noble but sleeping instincts had suddenly awoke, he would start and spread out his broad sails, and leap upward, revealing an iron chain, that, usually covered by his plumage, drew him back again to his place. But though this bird of heaven knew the way to soar aloft, and, sometimes, felt the thirst for freedom, freedom was not for him, till a power greater than his own proclaimed liberty to the captive, and shattered the shackles that bound him to his perch. Nor is there freedom for the soul of man till the Spirit of God sets him free, and by the lightning force of truth, breaks the chains that bind us to sin." [*Guthrie.*]

3. We need Him as a Monitor. "He stirs up in us diligence, watchfulness, and earnest endeavours. He is 'the Word behind thee saying, "This is the way—walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.'" The cares and business of the world often drive the sense of our duty out of our minds. God's Spirit puts us in remembrance, and revives truth to us in season. A ship, though never so well rigged, needs a pilot; we need a good guide to put us in mind of our duty."

[*Manton.*]

4. He gives a heavenly instinct. "'Tell me,' said a father to a son, 'what difference you can detect between two needles—one of which has received an electric shock, while the other has not, and yet the one has hidden virtues which occasion will show, of which the other has none.' The electric shock has rendered the one needle a magnet, which, duly balanced, will enable a man to find his way across the trackless ocean. As this needle, so may that soul be which has received the electric shock of the

Holy Spirit; on the ocean of a sinful world, it shall point wanderers to the heaven of everlasting rest." [*Anon.*]

5. He conveys a knowledge of spiritual things. "You may try to teach a child the meaning of the term 'sweetness,' but words will not avail; give him some honey and he will never forget. You might seek to tell him of the glorious mountains, and the Alps that pierce the clouds, and send their snowy peaks, like white-robed ambassadors, up to the courts of heaven; take him there, let him see them, and he will never forget them. You might paint to him the grandeur of the American continent, with its hills, and lakes, and rivers, such as the world sees nowhere else; but let him go and view it, and he will know more of the land than he could do by all your teaching, while he sits at home. So the Holy Spirit not only tells us about Christ's love, but 'sheds it abroad in the heart.' He not only tells us of the sweetness of pardon, but gives us a sense of no condemnation, and then we know all about it better than we would have done by any teaching of words and thoughts." [*Spurgeon.*]

"None so blind whose eyes the Spirit cannot open. He who by His incubation upon the waters at the Creation, hatched that rude mass into the beautiful form we now see; and out of that dark chaos made the glorious heavens, and garnished them with so many orient stars, can move on thy darkened soul, and enlighten it, though now it be as void of knowledge as the evening of the world's first day was of light. The schoolmaster sometimes sends home the child, and bids the father put him to another trade, because not able, with all his art, to make a scholar of him; but if the Spirit of God be the master, thou shalt learn, though a very dunce." [*Gurnall.*]

"The most correct and lively description of the sun cannot convey either the light, the warmth, the cheerfulness, or the fruitfulness which the actual shining of that luminary conveys; neither can the most laboured and accurate dissertations on grace and spiritual things impart a true idea of them, without an experience of the Holy Spirit's work on the heart. [*Toplady.*]

6. He breaks the seal of the Scriptures. "He that hath not the right key is as far from entering the house as he that hath none, yea, in some sense further; for he that hath none will call to him that is within, while the other, trusting to his false key, stands pottering without to little purpose. The Pharisees were not a little conversant with the Scriptures, yet they missed that truth which lay before them in almost every page and leaf of Moses and the Prophets, whom they were in their every-day study tumbling over.—I mean the grand truth concerning Christ, of which Moses and the Prophets everywhere speak." [*Gurnall.*]

"Scripture can be savingly understood only by the inward illumination of the Holy Ghost. The Gospel is a picture of God's free grace to sinners. Were we in a room hung with the finest paintings, and adorned with the most exquisite statues, we could not see one of them if all light were excluded. Now the blessed Spirit's irradiation is the same to the mind that outward light is to the bodily eyes." [*Toplady.*]

"If you go to a sun-dial at night and study it with a brilliant lamp, you may trace every figure and understand the markings thoroughly, but you will learn nothing of its practical use. If you want to do that, you must go to it when the sun is in its meridian, and then you will not only see the structure of the dial, but discover from it the hour of the day. So in reading this sacred book you can by the lamp-light of human reason, or the moonlight of tradition, understand it in its outward facts, but in its inner and saving meaning, you must ask the Author of the book to explain it to you. If on reading any book you find a passage of which you can make nothing, you do

not go to others for the solution, but you go to the author himself, if within reach and accessible, and so get from him the best of all explanations. So the Divine Spirit who at first wrote this book waits at all times to explain its contents to those who ask Him to enlighten them." [*Cumming.*]

"To unconverted persons a great part of the Bible resembles a letter written in cipher. The blessed Spirit's office is to act as God's decipherer, by letting His people into the secret of celestial experience, as the key and clue to those sweet mysteries of grace which were before as a garden shut up, or as a fountain sealed, or as a book written in an unknown character." [*Toplady.*]

"Unconverted men often say, 'If these things are so clear and so important, why cannot we see them?' And there is no answer but this—'Ye are blind.' 'But we want to see them. If they are real, they are our concern as well as yours. O that we had a preacher!' But there is no such preacher as they desire. Let him gather God's light as he will, he can but pour it on blind eyes. A burning-glass will condense sunbeams into a focus of brightness; and if a blind eye be put there not a whit will it see, though it be consumed.

Strong powers of understanding on your part will not serve. The great Earl of Chatham once went with a pious friend to hear Mr. Cecil. The sermon was on the Spirit's agency in the hearts of believers. As they were coming from church, the mighty statesman confessed that he could not understand it all, and asked his friend if he supposed that any one could? 'Why, yes,' said he, 'there were some plain, unlettered women and some children there, who understood every word of it and heard it with joy.'" [*Hoge.*]

7. **He vitalises all means of grace.** "Such is my belief in the reality, and existence, and agency of the Divine Spirit, that I think I should have no hope and no faith as a minister and labourer for the enfranchisement of mankind, if it were not that I believed there was an all-prevalent, vitalising Divine Spirit. I should as soon attempt to raise flowers if there were no atmosphere, or to produce fruits if there were neither light nor heat, as I should attempt to regenerate men, if I did not believe there was a Holy Ghost. I have faith in the Divine Spirit spread abroad over the whole human family, which is really the cause of life in the higher directions; and it is this faith that gives me hope and courage in all labour." [*Beecher.*]

"Ordinances are but as the sails of a ship, ministers as the seamen that manage those sails; the anchor may be weighed, the sails spread; but when all is done, there is no sailing till a gale come. We preach and pray, and you hear; but there is no motion Christward, until the Spirit of God blows upon them." [*Flavel.*]

"In vain do the inhabitants of London go to their conduits for supply, unless the man who has the master-key turn the water on; and in vain do we think to quench our thirst at ordinances, unless God communicate the living water of His Spirit. The word of God is of no avail to salvation without the Spirit of God. A compass is of no use to the mariner, unless he has light to see it by." [*Toplady.*]

"An atmosphere without the sun would leave the earth cold and cheerless—a dreary habitation for living men. So the ordinances of the Gospel are streams which gladden the Church of God only, when He makes them the vehicles of His own power and presence to the soul." [*Salter.*]

8. **Without him no power.** "Suppose an army to sit down before a granite fortress, and they intend to batter it down. We ask how? They point to a cannon-ball. Well, but there is no power in that. It is heavy, but not more than a hundredweight, or even half that. If all the men in the army were to throw it, that would make no impression. 'No,' they say, 'but look at the cannon.' Well, but there is no power in that; it is a machine.

and nothing more. 'But look at the powder.' Well, there is no power in that; a child may spill it, a sparrow may pick it up. Yet this powerless powder, and this powerless ball, are put into this powerless cannon; *one spark of fire* enters it, and in the twinkling of an eye, that powder is a flash of lightning, and that cannon-ball is a thunderbolt, which smites as if it had been sent from heaven. So with our church machinery of the present day. We have instruments for pulling down our strongholds, but, *Oh! for the baptism of fire.*" [*Arthur.*]

IV. Demonstration of the Spirit.

"Demonstration is opposed to loose declamation, whereby the affections are captivated, but the judgment is left out. Here the judgment is first enlightened, and then the will and affections obey its decision. "The new man is created in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." There is not merely rational demonstration. "He that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto Me." He works as the "Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ." Before the eyes of the Galatians Jesus Christ was set forth "evidently," *or drawn to the life.* No one could do this but the Holy Spirit. Man can no more communicate this demonstration to his fellow than he can give understanding to an idiot, or sight to the blind." This good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights." The things thus demonstrated are "most surely believed."

A man who has a just sense of the weakness and fallibility of his own intellect may have misgivings that there is some flaw in his reasoning. It is, after all, but a chain of deductions, and some link may be left out, or may be weak and loose. But he who is led by the Spirit is assured by direct consciousness, and "needs not that any man teach him," for in himself he feels "that this is truth, and is no lie." "The Gospel comes to him not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost and much assurance."

The man who knows the truth, as taught by the Spirit, finds it to be "light to the eyes," and "joy to the heart." He rejoices in God's Word "more than in all riches." It creates a present heaven in the soul, for it is "full of glory." He knows the paradox, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." The man with merely rational conviction does not intermeddle with this joy. The joy of the believer is far superior to that of those who "divide great store of spoil." He says out of a full heart, "I will delight myself in Thy commandments which I have loved." Many who could not defend their faith by force of reasoning against the sophistical cavils of their persecutors, could yet give this noble and unanswerable reply:—"I cannot speak for Christ, but I can burn for Him!" There is what the demonstration of the Spirit can do.

[*Jamieson.*]

V. Indwelling of the Spirit. "Every man who gives himself to Christ, and so belongs to Him, receives the Spirit of Christ to dwell in him as a proof of the same; 'for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.' All Christians are said to be 'builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.' Addressing those who are Christians, the sacred writer says, 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.' 'The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.'"

This indwelling of the Spirit displays love, grace, and power worthy of the highest admiration. To enter into a human soul foul with the deepest stains, in which everything revolting to the holiness of His nature is exhibited, and to exert his influence there to purify it, and fit it for the refined and exalted joys of religion is condescension and benevolence, surpassing conception. He meets with resistance but does not retire; all the strength of the corrupt nature is opposed to His design—yet He subdues it with the utmost patience and forbearance. In His plastic hands, man

an outcast from His Maker, vile and helpless—given over as irrecoverably lost, is transformed into a being adorned with the likeness of his Creator, devoted to His service, and destined to live in the happy seats of the spirits of light.

As a Divine Person, the Holy Spirit inhabits the temple of the universe, and heaven and earth are sustained and beautified by His influence. But He selects the souls of believers as the scene of His gracious operations. There He is present as the Spirit of truth and consolation. It is His office to diffuse the cheering and tranquillizing light of heaven, to shed a divine serenity over the thoughts and feelings, to inspire and strengthen good principles, to elevate the affections above secular objects, to give a taste of the sweetness of spiritual things, and to awaken hope with all its blissful anticipations. It is compared to a "well of living water springing up to everlasting life." In youth, manhood, and old age, He promotes the growth of grace, and gives a foretaste of celestial bliss. The joy of the Christian is thus within. No man takes it from him. He is satisfied from himself—from the communications of the divine inmate in his soul, whose presence is life and whose favour is the sunshine of his spirit. *Omnia mea mecum porto*, said a self-sufficient sage of antiquity; it was a poor stock, and he must have starved upon it without the assistance of pride. But the Christian, with the Holy Ghost dwelling in his heart, can say with truth, that he "carries all his treasures with him," for wherever he goes his joy remains and is full" (Rom. xiv. 17). [*Dick.*]

"A house uninhabited soon comes to ruin; and a soul uninhabited by the Holy Spirit of God verges faster and faster to destruction." [*Toplady.*]

"This indwelling of the Spirit is a pledge and foretaste of heaven. In the early times when land was sold, the owner cut a turf from the green sward, and cast it into the cap of the purchaser as a token that it was his; or he tore off the branch of a tree and put it into the new owner's hand to show that he was entitled to all the products of the soil; and when the purchaser of a house received seizin or possession, the key of the door, or a bundle of thatch plucked from the roof, signified that the building was yielded up to him.

The God of all grace has given to His people all the perfections of heaven to be their heritage for ever, and the earnest of His Spirit is to them the blessed token that all things are theirs.

The Spirit's work of comfort and sanctification is a part of heaven's covenant blessings—a turf from the soil of Canaan, a twig from the tree of life, the key to mansions in the skies. Possessing the earnest of the Spirit, we have received *seizin* of heaven." [*Spurgeon.*]

VI. Spirit's work silent and gentle.

"The Holy Spirit leads us as a mother leads by the hand her child of two years old; as a person who can see leads one who is blind." [*Vianney.*]

"The operation of the Spirit doth very much imitate that of nature. It is in a very still and silent way, that the sap is drained in by the root, and ascends up the trunk of the tree, and diffuses itself to every branch, so that we may see that it lives, but we do not see how. The case is with souls that are brought to live in the Spirit, as with very infirm and languishing persons, who have been consumed and even next to death, in a corrupt air. Being removed into such as is pure and wholesome they revive, but in a very insensible way; so is this life preserved by a vital spiritual influence, which is a pure air to them, a gentle, indulgent, benign, and cherishing air; they live by it, and never a whit the worse, because it is not so turbulent as to make a noise." [*Salter.*]

"Many of the most powerful agents of nature are themselves unseen, and only discovered by their fruits. We do not see the wind, either in the gentle breeze to fan us, or in the hurricane to work destruction among the labours of man. The heat that nourishes the plants of the earth, and the electricity so intimately connected with all atmospherical and organic

changes move secretly and in silence. God Himself too, is unseen in the midst of His works. When we go forth to meditate, we are constrained to acknowledge that God is everywhere among these works of grandeur, and yet by intense gaze we cannot discover His person, nor, by patient listening, hear the sound of His footsteps. No jarring sound of mechanism comes across the void that intervenes between us and these heavens—no voice reaches our ear to tell of the Worker—it is the heavens themselves that declare His glory. And why should the God who created us, not be able to renew the heart, and yet be as unseen in the one case as the other?

There is a manifest congruity in the circumstance that the Agent conducts His work so silently and imperceptibly. Only thus can the spirit of man retain its separate action and freedom. There is no violence done to man's nature in the supernatural work carried on in the heart. The dealings of God are in every respect suited to the essential principles of man's nature, 'I drew them with the cords of a man.'" [*McCosh.*]

"Can I see the dew of heaven as it falls on a summer evening? I cannot. It comes down softly and gently, noiselessly and imperceptibly. But when I go forth in the morning after a cloudless night, and see every leaf sparkling with moisture, and feel every blade of grass damp and wet, I say at once 'there has been a dew.' Just so it is with the presence of the Spirit in the soul." [*Ryle.*]

"A young man who had been piously brought up, but who had given himself to vice and folly, at last joined a company of pirates. A voice soft and gentle as a mother's seemed to be always pleading with him; it was the cooing of a dove. He tried to shake off the effect, but again and again the sound threw his soul into a turmoil. One night when all was still around him, the tender, reproachful murmur seemed to pierce his very heart. He could stand it no longer; but throwing himself on his knees in an agony of contrition, he vowed before God to forsake his evil ways. By God's help he did so. He went back to his home, became an altered man, and lived henceforward a pious and useful life." [*Anon.*]

VII. Sin and folly of grieving or resisting the Spirit. "In times when vile men held the high places of the land, a roll of drums was employed to drown the martyr's voice lest the testimony of truth from the scaffold should reach the ears of the people—an illustration of how men deal with their own consciences and seek to put to silence the truth-telling voice of the Holy Spirit." [*Arnot.*]

"The Holy Spirit of God is our guide. Who would displease his guide, a sweet, comfortable guide, that leads us through the wilderness of this world? As the cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, He conducts us to the Heavenly Canaan. If we grieve our guide we cause Him to leave us to ourselves. The people of old would not go a step further than God by His angel went before them. It is in vain for us to make toward heaven without our blessed Guide." [*Sibbes.*]

"Take heed, sinners, how you use the Spirit when He comes knocking at the door of your hearts. Open at His knock and He will be your guest; you shall have His pleasant company; repulse Him, and you have not a promise that He will knock again. If once He leave striving with thee, unhappy man, thou art lost! Thou liest like a ship cast up by the waves on some high rock, where the tide never comes to fetch it off. Thou wilt use ordinances in vain. The Spirit is both wind and tide to them, to set the soul afloat, and carry it on, or else it lies like a ship on dry ground which stirs not." [*Gurnall.*]

VIII. Invite the Spirit to come again. "Lord, the motions of the Holy Spirit were formerly frequent in my heart. But alas! of late they have been great strangers. It is my great desire they should come again. Let

the Spirit be pleased, not only to stand and knock before the door, but also to come in. If I do not open the door, let me humbly beg of thee, that thou would'st make the iron gate of my heart open of its own accord. Then let thy Spirit be pleased to sup in my heart. I have given it an invitation, and I hope I shall give it room. But O thou that sendest guests, send the meal also; and if I be so unmannerly as not to bid the Holy Spirit welcome, let Thy effectual grace cause me to make it so." [*Fuller.*]

Return, O Holy Dove, return!
Sweet messenger of rest;
I hate the sins that made thee mourn,
And drove thee from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only thee.

ADDED SIN, RENEWED CHASTISEMENT, AND GRACIOUS DELIVERANCE.

Verses 12–30.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**12. Did evil again in sight of the Lord.]** The word רָעָה or הָרַע from רעע is used the same both here and in verse 7 to signify *evil;* but whereas in verse 7 we have the verb עָשׂוּ, meaning simply *did*, or *wrought*, in verse 12 we have יֹסִפוּ, meaning *added* to former sin (see also chap. iv. 1; x. 6; xiii. 1), or *continued* to do evil. God does not forget to count the old sin, when He marks the commission of new sin. Did evil,] not evil generally, but *the* evil to which they were prone, and on account of which the Lord had a controversy with them, viz., *idolatry*. The Lord strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel.] stirred him up, gave him facilities for carrying out the designs of his own heart against that people, and overruled all the circumstances of Providence, so as to give him easy success in oppressing Israel. The name *Eglon* signifies "little calf." In the present instance, the contrary epithet would be more correct.

13. Gathered unto him—Ammon and Amalek.] Allied himself with these near neighbours. Moab and Ammon were brothers, having the same parentage, and might naturally be supposed to co-operate in all great enterprises. In the Amalekites the old spirit of Esau breathed, who looked on Jacob with undying hate, because by him he had been defrauded of the blessing. Now that spirit still rankles in the hearts of generations far down the scale; and if we even go on to the days of Jehoshaphat, we find it burning with undiminished intensity (2 Chron. xx.)—if, as is probable, "the inhabitants of Mount Seir" there spoken of, be the same, in whole, or in part, with the Amalekites (comp. 1 Chron. iv. 42, 43). (See also Ex. xvii. 14; Deut. xxv. 18, 19; 1 Sam. xv.; Ps. lxxxiii. 6, 7.) "As God raised up deliverers to Israel when they were penitent, so He stirred up enemies to them, and gave them power to oppress them, when they revolted from Him. Since they worshipped the gods of the people round about them (chap. ii. 12), it was fit that they should be punished by those very people." [*Patrick.*] In this crusade against Israel, all the parties might not have the same motives, but they were at one in their bitter hatred of that people—the seed of the serpent as against that of the woman—the world as against the church of God. Moab was the chief actor, tempted partly by the richness of the country, for Josephus says it was a "divine country." *Cassel* says, "The Moabites longed for the excellent oasis of "The city of Palms." Jericho was indeed destroyed, but the indestructible wealth of its splendid site attracted them. Perhaps, too, they had began to observe signs of a certain weakness among the tribes of Israel, now that Othniel was dead; for it could not escape the notice of surrounding nations, that states of weakness and strength were periodical with Israel, according as God was absent from them, or was with them. This was now, therefore, reckoned a fit time to put in execution a long-cherished design. A large part of the territory occupied by Reuben and Gad, to the east of Jordan, was of old time possessed by Moab. Of this it had been dispossessed by the Amorites. When the Israelites came round on their march to Canaan, they routed and annihilated these Amorites under Sihon, and took possession of their lands. These lands Moab now claimed, and made this a pretext for war. Josephus says, Eglon first subjugates the tribes to the east of the river, and then made a sudden incursion to the west. He probably regarded the site of Jericho as a good strategical point for headquarters, whence he could stretch his hand on either side with ease. It was also the spot to command the fords; and so he could split Israel into two, preventing those on the east and west sides from helping each other. The city of palm trees.] A heavy curse was pronounced against it by Joshua, and a blight seems already to have fallen upon its name; for it is no longer known as "Jericho," but as "the city of palm trees" (Joshua vi. 26). Sixty years had passed since it had been burned, and it was not rebuilt until the time of Ahab (1 Kings xvi. 34). But the exceedingly desirable character of the site led the Israelites to occupy it as an unwalled town, or village, but not as a fortress, or compactly built city. Eglon would disregard the curse of Joshua.

14. Israel served Eglon.] He became their absolute master, which was very humbling at the hands of an old enemy, who was struck with dismay before them in the days of Balak. But probably the word has the force of stating that they *lay at his mercy, i.e.*, the mercy of a cruel, despotic, and capricious tyrant. "*Eighteen years*" is more than double the period of their former servitude. But their sin being repeated was now aggravated.

15. Israel cried unto the Lord.] (See notes on verse 9.) Probably "humbled themselves before Him, acknowledged their offence, begged His pardom, and besought His help." [*Patrick.*] They may have used such supplications as are recorded in Psalm xliv. 20-26. **The Lord raised.]** "The same hand that raised up Eglon against Israel, raised up also Ehud for Israel against Eglon." He was not chosen by the people on account of any supposed gifts of wisdom and prowess which he possessed, but was the instrument God was pleased to employ in working out His salvation for the people. *Hengstenberg* says, "the choice of means was left to Himself." That is at best an assertion, to meet a difficulty. It is not likely that God would leave His chosen instrument to use means of which He would not Himself approve. The deliverance here wrought certainly was from God, whose servant in doing it Ehud was. **Son of Gera, etc.],** *i.e.*, a descendant of Gera, who was an immediate son of Benjamin (Gen. xlvi. 21). He was a Benjamite in the line of Gera—of that family-tree. Shimei, who cursed David long afterwards, was also "a son of Gera," which may mean a descendant of Gera; or there were very likely more persons of that name in the same tribe. Benjamin was the tribe which, being nearest, was likely to be most severely oppressed by the invader, and therefore it was fit that the deliverer should come from it. **A man left-handed]**—*shut up, or bound in, his right hand.* Some suppose that Ehud was an *ambidexter*, and could use both hands alike, corresponding with chap. xx. 16, and 1 Chron. xii. 2. It is singular, as appears from these passages was the fact, that the descendants of the man who was "the son of the right hand," should have coveted the distinction of being *skilled* in the use of the left. The word used here neither means strictly *both-handed*, nor *one-handed*, but rather that from some cause he was disabled as to his use of the right hand, and therefore, as Josephus expresses it, "*of the two could use the left hand best.*" There was some deficiency of power in the use of the right hand, whether from habitual non-use, or accidental defect, it matters not. It was by a man who had only the effective use of his left hand that God delivered His people. **A deliverer]** means one to set them free from bondage. **Sent a present unto Eglon.]** Some say, this was a voluntary offering sent to purchase peace with Eglon, or to secure the lightening of the yoke he put upon them. But the general opinion is, that it was *the annual tribute* which they were required to pay in acknowledgment of their subjection, and which it was better for them to pay voluntarily, than to have exactors coming through among their homes. It also gratified the vanity of the monarch, and led him to be better pleased with them. The word מִנְחָה, though used of "meat offerings" in Lev. ii. 1, is generally a euphemistic phrase for tribute (1 Kings v. 1; 2 Sam. viii. 2, 6), an acknowledgment of dependence, but also a token of goodwill (Gen. xxxii. 18; Ps. lxxii. 10). Ehud was chosen to be the bearer of it, because he was recognised as raised up of God to be the deliverer or redeemer of Israel, and not because of the high place he held in the estimation of his countrymen. [*Fausset.*]

16. Made him a dagger which had two edges, etc.] The Hebrew word signifies *sword* (Sept. and Vulg.). The word *dagger* or *dirk* properly expresses it here; or, some regard it as a *stiletto*, as used by the Italians. It was a somewhat peculiar weapon, made very sharp and short, to be both very effective, and capable of being easily concealed. It was clear that the purpose for which it was eventually used was already in Ehud's mind. The "word of God" is compared to a "sharp sword with two edges," because it is a more powerful weapon, as applied to the heart and conscience than any other (Heb. iv. 12; Rev. i. 16, etc.). He did gird it on his *right* thigh (comp. Ps. xlv. 3), to be in readiness for use by the left hand, and where its presence would not be suspected, the left being the sword side. **A cubit length.]** Go-med is not the usual word for cubit. The Sept. translates it σπιθαμὴ, which the Greeks made *half an ell*, or three-fourths of a foot. Being thus only nine inches in length, and the handle also being short, it could easily be concealed. **Put under raiment.]** Military cloak, or wide flowing garments. He thus would have the appearance of a man unarmed. "With such daggers in their garments, the Sicarii raged among the crowds at the fall of Jerusalem."

17. Eglon was a very fat man.] Probably was a luxurious liver, and belonged to the class described as "natural brute beasts" (2 Peter ii. 12), "whose god is their belly" (Phil. iii. 18), "who spend their days amid wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave" (Job xxi. 13; Luke xxi. 34; Rom. xii. 13). *Belshazzar* and *Nabal* are examples.

18. Dismissed the people.] His *retinue*, here called אֶת־הָעָם, implying that there was a considerable number of persons employed to bear the *minchah*. Also the phrase "*made an end to offer the present*" implies it was a matter of great ceremony. It is quite in keeping with Oriental customs to make great parade in presenting such offerings. To enhance the apparent value of the gift, a great number of persons, camels, and horses were employed to convey what might have been carried with ease by two or three. (See account in *Pictorial Bible in loco.*) This ceremony was now gone through with punctilious order, and signs of due submission.

19. Quarries.] פְּסִילִים. In other places where this word occurs it signifies *graven images* (Deut. vii. 25; Jer. viii. 19; li. 52). So also the Sept. and Vulg., and the margin of our Bibles. The Targum renders as our version. *Lias* says it is never elsewhere used of *stone quarries;* but it is derived from a word signifying to *hew stones* (Ex. xxxiv. 1, 4; Deut. x. 1, 3), where it is used of the making of the two tables of stone. *Keil* thinks it unlikely that stone idols were set up in the open air, and prefers rendering it as in the text, "*stone quarries*," which is the one adopted by the Chaldee, by Rashi, and most Jewish commentators, also by the Syriac version. *Fausset* prefers "*graven images*," which he says the Moabites would put up to mark the conquered country as under the tutelage of their gods, at the place which marked the boundary line of the Moabitish dominion. This was Gilgal, about four miles to the west of Jordan. The name signifies "*rolled*," because here the Israelites rolled off the reproach of Egypt by being circumcised. Now that reproach is rolled back on them again, The sight of these images would fire Ehud's zeal against Eglon. We prefer *Cassel's* interpretation, who translates the word *boundary-stones*—not *quarries*, for this does not harmonise with the locality, but stones set up to mark the borders of Eglon's territory, which he had wrenched from Israel. They might be called *posts*, στῆλαι or *lapides sacri*, which marked the line. Honours were generally paid to them, and hence they were called *Pesilim*, idol-images, or idolatrous objects. The Targum substantially agrees with this, which makes it to mean *heaps of unhewn stones*. *Bachmann* only slightly differs, who thinks the *Pesilim* were idolatrous images set up as boundary marks of the territory ruled over by the heathen king. So Ehud did not feel secure till he had passed the *Pesilim*. *Edersheim* concurs, who makes it signify *terminal columns*, which were always objects of idolatrous worship, that divided the territory of Israel from that of Eglon. He turned again from the boundary stones, etc.] The account now becomes very vivid and graphic. He returns all alone to the king, perhaps within a few hours. His coming alone both disarmed suspicion, and also consisted with his profession to have a sacred mission to the king. Eglon would doubtless be already favourably impressed towards the man who had been, only a few hours ago, the bearer of so handsome an offering, and would be prepared to grant any reasonable request he might make. The way was thus open; and Ehud, as if eager and in haste, said—rather, bid say, to the king, "*I have a secret word to thee, O king.*" On hearing this, the call is given הֶס *Hush!* All present at once understood, and retired, leaving the sovereign liege and his vassal together alone. "*All that stood by.*" The attendants did not *sit* in the royal presence; all *stood*. It was natural to suppose that Ehud wished to communicate something which, at his previous visit, he could not tell in the hearing of the people who were with him.

20. And Ehud came unto him.] At first he appears to have been only in the ante-chamber. Now he is admitted into the inner apartment—the king's own. This is called a summer parlour, *an upper room of cooling*. Luther calls it, his *summer arbour*. It was something like a Turkish *kiosk*—"a small room built by itself on the roof of the house, having many windows to catch the breeze." At that part of the course of the river, its bed lies low, and there being high grounds on either side, it is necessarily very warm, so that such a cooling shelter is greatly needed. An Eastern traveller says, "there is often a door of communication from the cooling apartment, or *alijah*, into the gallery of the house, besides another which opens immediately from a privy stair, down into the porch or street, without giving the least disturbance to the house." Persons having secret audience with the king might be admitted or dismissed through that private stair, without passing through the rooms of the house. The apartment where the king was sitting was properly intended for purposes of entire seclusion and rest, but might be used as an audience chamber—which he had for himself alone.] It was entirely for his own private use. Possibly Ehud found this out only on the early part of that same day, when he came with the present, and saw how things were arranged in the king's palace. He then discovered that it would be perfectly possible to get access to him alone, could he but assign a proper reason for asking such a privilege. Doubtless he prayed for Divine direction and success in regard to what he was about to do, for he felt he was working for God. **And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee**]—from *Elohim*—which Ehud would understand to mean the *true God*, the God of Israel, but which Eglon would probably regard as a name for the *gods*. We cannot suppose that Ehud a man chosen by God Himself for doing His work, should directly lie to the heathen king, saying that *chemosh* or some heathen deity had sent him, and so by a nefarious method seek to gain his end. It is also quite fanciful to suppose, as Cassel does, that the reference is not to the Deity at all, but to the supreme authority of Moab—the reigning monarch, of whom Eglon was only a satrap or liegeman. The reference must have been to the Deity; and even if Eglon had regarded it as meaning the God of Israel, princes sitting on his throne had trembled at that name before and might do so again. The story of Balak and his frantic efforts to get that people cursed by their God, had lived down through the three generations that had elapsed since; and the destruction of the whole of the Canaanitish peoples before the sword of Joshua, created a mighty shock among all the surrounding nations; so that the name of such a God was certain to strike with dismay every heart among the worshippers of idols (Joshua ii. 9, 11; ix. 24). To have a message sent direct to himself personally from such a Deity, would inspire Eglon with an undefined awe and he would almost involuntarily rise from his seat, at the very mention of such a thing. It was really a message from the God of

Israel to Moab's ruler, in a way similar to that which was addressed to Pharaoh. To the latter the message was, "Let my people go, that they may serve me." To the former, it was a message of doom. "Because thou hast oppressed my people so long, now the hour of thy doom and of their deliverance has come, and thou must die." Ehud might have supposed that this statement would induce the king to rise, but the principal reason for his so addressing the monarch was to assure him from whose hand the blow came—the God whose people he had been treading down like the mire. We believe that Ehud's conduct was straightforward throughout, and without deceit, however strong the step he was taking.

21. At once Ehud put forth his left hand, etc.] We now see the value of Ehud's left-handedness. He could lay his hand on his dagger without exciting any suspicion, till it was too late for the victim to call for help. In like manner Cleander stabbed Parmenio while he was reading a letter. And Clement, a monk, who had obtained a commission to get into the presence of Henry III. of France, stabbed the king the moment he was bidden to draw near. Metillius Cimber, along with other conspirators, pressed closely on Cæsar, making most urgent entreaty for the recall of his banished brother, and so they all closed in upon their victim.

22, 23. And the haft also went in, etc.] It appears there was an actual perforation of the body The poniard was so forcibly thrust into the abdomen, that the hilt followed the blade, and, the fat closing on both, it was impossible to draw the dagger out again. To show the force of the blow, it is added that the excrement came out. The king appears to have fallen without being able to utter a single cry; the deed was done so swiftly and so overwhelmingly. Ehud lost not a moment. First, he is careful to lock the door or doors (for there seems to have been two—one leading into the antechamber where the attendants usually stood in waiting, and the other leading to the private stair which conducted down to the porch or front hall and street). He must, at the foot of that stair, down which he went, have had to pass through some of the attendants before getting to the outside of the building. But his demeanour seems to have been so cool and collected, that no suspicion was excited of anything so terrible having happened in so incredibly short a space of time; and more especially, as not even the most distant hint, or sign, of throwing off the yoke of the conqueror had been given, but the very contrary had happened that very day. Nothing therefore was farther from their thoughts than such a suspicion. But what did occur to them we are told of in—

24, 25. They said, Surely he covereth his feet, etc.] The rules required that they should not enter into the *alijah* or private cooling chamber, till the person who had been privileged with the secret audience had gone away, nor, indeed, till called. After waiting for some time, and no call being made, they examined the doors of the *alijah*, both of which they found locked. On which they concluded that their lord was taking his *siesta*—it still being the hot part of the day. In this case, it would have been dangerous for them to have awakened him, at any rate for some time. Hence they waited till they were ashamed of having waited so long. Then only they began to suspect that all was not right. These small circumstances, though natural, were yet overruled by Divine Providence to accomplish important ends. To gain time was essential to Ehud's safety. Had the servants burst open the door at once, he would infallibly have been pursued, and brought back to be put to a certain and cruel death—that which they would reckon suitable to a regicide, and so the great cause of the liberation of God's people from a foreign yoke, with which Ehud's life was bound up, would have come to nought. It was of God that such thoughts should be made to rise in the minds of the servants, and so, that much time should have been allowed to elapse, ere a discovery was made of the fearful tragedy which had just been enacted. At length they opened the doors with another key, of which the chief officer of the house was in possession (for it was his privilege to keep a duplicate of the key) and behold their master was stretched on the floor quite dead!

26. And Ehud escaped while they tarried.] That Ehud should make a clear escape was of God. First he got to the boundary-stones. These are referred to, because they marked the border between Moab and Israel as it then existed. Then he took the direction towards Ephraim, and seems not to have halted till he reached "Seirath," where he reckoned himself safe from pursuit. It was either a forest or weald, that bordered on the cultivated land near Gilgal, and extended into the mountain or hill country of Ephraim (Joshua xvii. 15-18); or it was a continuation of the bushy, rugged hills, that stretch to Judah's northern territory from Mount Ephraim (Joshua xv. 10). But Seirath is little known, and is not referred to again. It seems to have been in Ephraim, on the southern frontier, and near the borders of either Judah or Benjamin.

27. Having got among his own people Ehud felt there was not a moment to be lost. With vigorous hand he seized a trumpet, and blew a blast loud and long, awakening the whole land with the tidings, that now the door was open for regaining their precious liberties from the yoke of the oppressor. They had but to follow up the blow that had been struck, and every home in Israel would be free. It was a true "*reveillé*" note. Fresh with hope Israel rose at the call. As awakened out of sleep those who heard it sprung up, and came trooping to the

deliverer—from the caves, the thickets, the rocks, and even the pits, in which the country abounded (1 Sam. xiii. 6), and to which the people in large numbers had betaken themselves, as a refuge from the oppression of Moab. It was chiefly the men of Ephraim and perhaps of Benjamin who responded to the call; and they went as one man, flushed with the hope that victory was already sure, and that God was with their deliverer in the work which had been so well begun. Ehud had already matured his plan of operations. Believing that so much depended on courage and confidence, he himself sets the example, not calling to them to move forward, but going forward himself in front, and then calling on them to follow him. The vital point of strategy was the fords of Jordan. With these in their possession, they could prevent the Moabites on the west side from returning homewards, and equally prevent those on the east side from crossing over to assist their countrymen who were attacked on all sides in the land of Israel.

Note to Verse 27. It has been noticed in connection with the people taking refuge in the mountains, that "in those days of cruel warfare and oppression, the home of liberty was always in the fastnesses of the mountains. As the narrative of Xenophon shows, the mountain peoples in the Persian empire were practically independent of the central power. So in the middle ages, the Swiss mountaineers defied alike the power of Austria and Burgundy. And among ourselves, the history of Wales and the Highlands of Scotland, are proofs, that even a powerful government had very little real authority in the inaccessible recesses of the mountains. It is only the rapid advance of modern discovery which has enabled us to penetrate these regions, and to place the invaders of a mountain district upon a footing of something more like equality with its defenders."

28, 29. **The Lord hath delivered your enemies into your hands, etc.**] This announcement coming from the lips of the man whom God had already owned with such signal success, would inspire them with the assurance of victory. Moving on with leaps and bounds, they soon reached the fords of Jordan; of which they at once took possession, and slaughtered the Moabites who came in straggling bands from Jericho, with the view of crossing the river. Of the whole army of Eglon on the west side of the river, not a man seems to have escaped. There fell of them 10,000 men—all *robust* or *chosen* men—(אִישׁ שָׁמֵן *robust, well-conditioned,* חַיִל *power, valour*) and men of valour. This had the effect, we are told, in verse 30, of crushing all further attempts of Moab to oppress Israel.

NOTE.—How we are to view Ehud's conduct. Most commentators pass a severe censure on "*the manner in which Ehud acted throughout this whole transaction,* and feel difficulty in accounting for the fact, that God should make use of such means to emancipate His people from bondage. *Some* go so far as to deny to Ehud any grandeur of character at all, and accuse him of duplicity and sleight of hand. *Others,* while admitting that a measure of admiration is due to the courage he displayed, his heroic spirit of self-sacrifice for the good of his country, and his purity of motive on the whole; yet denounce the means he adopted as treacherous and savage. *Most writers* regard it as conduct of which God could not approve, and notice that it is not said "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him," and that no special mark of commendation is put on his conduct, while his name is not found in the list of those "elders who by faith obtained a good report." Neither, we might add, is it said that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon" Barak, or Tola or Jair, who were all "judges" of Israel, and the first of whom has his name enrolled in the honourable list of the men of faith. As to that list, it is evident, that only a few names are given as a specimen; otherwise, why should no mention be made in it of such men as Joshua, Caleb, Othniel, and many others? As to the means adopted, if these had been displeasing to God, would there not have been some special mark of His disapprobation given, of the manner in which the messenger had fulfilled his duty, as in the case of Saul, when he returned from his expedition against Amalek, and was severely reprimanded for having failed to perform the commandment of the Lord; or, as in the case of Moses, when, standing in the stead of God, he smote the rock, in a spirit of unhallowed impatience, in place of calmly and solemnly speaking to it.

It is affirmed in the record, that "*God raised up Ehud to be a deliverer*"

to Israel (iii. 15). Admitting this, *Hengstenberg* says, "the choice of the means was left to himself." *Fausset* adds, that "assassination by a lie and treachery was a method of his own devising." *The Speakers' Commentary* regards his adoption of such a method as due to the age in which he lived, when human society applauded such acts, though viewed in the light of Christianity and the advanced civilisation of the present day, it would be reckoned a serious crime. *Dr. Cassell* holds that the brilliancy of the act cannot exculpate its highly reprehensible character. Ehud had, indeed, zeal for God, but "the Spirit of the Lord inspires neither such artifice, nor such murder." While *The Pulpit Commentary* sees, in this transaction, the Ruler among the nations making use of bad actions as well as good ones, to subserve His purposes. Thus, Jacob's deceit in obtaining the blessing, is referred to as an illustration. But there the Divine disapprobation was distinctly marked in Jacob's future history. If the Jews put the Saviour to death, and thereby God's high purpose in our redemption was fulfilled, they never contemplated any such issue, but thought only of gratifying their own malicious feelings against a Messiah, in whom they were completely disappointed. This was no parallel to the case of Ehud, who had no end of his own to serve, but meant only to carry out the purpose of Him who sent him. Besides, the Divine displeasure with the conduct of the crucifiers has been expressed with unexampled emphasis in the whole of their subsequent history. Ehud's name, on the contrary, has been handed down to immortality, without a single note of disapprobation at what he did, while the Providence of God wrought along with him, and protected him at every step in his perilous enterprise.

These explanations of Ehud's act appear to us to be alike defective and erroneous. We do not believe that God would choose an agent to do an important work in which His own glory was concerned, such as the emancipation of His own people from bondage, without both giving him qualification for the work (or causing the Spirit to rest upon him), and also giving him instructions as to how he should act so as to glorify God in the doing of it. Had Ehud out of revenge, and at his own instance, committed a cold-blooded murder on a defenceless man, without a note of warning, hurrying him into the presence of his God all unprepared, with his crimes on his head, even though he was lying under a ban, was a tyrant, a heathen, and an oppressor, we cannot suppose that God would accept such a deliberate act of assassination as the means of working out His holy purposes, without some explicit mark of reprobation of the means used. Had Ehud put Eglon to death of his own thought, it must have been murder, and that is a crime of such magnitude, that when committed by one who was acknowledged by God to be acting as His servant, it must have been marked by the sternest condemnation. Even among men, such an act could not escape severe reprehension, on the part of all who repudiate the principles of retaliation, and who believe it wrong to do evil that good may come. We feel then shut up to the conclusion, that, in what he did, he acted in obedience to Divine command. This agrees with his own declaration, "*I have a message from Elohim unto thee,*" and the parallel statement in verse 19, "*I have a secret errand unto thee, O King,*" meaning a message, or errand of *doom.* In going to the king then, he acted as one *commissioned;* it was not at his own instance. The statement in verse 28 corresponds, "*Follow me, for the Lord hath delivered your enemies into your hands.*" This seems to be said oracularly, as by one who was under God's guidance in the whole transaction, and had received the intimations of His will.

This we believe is *the first step to any true explanation of the facts.* The matter proceeded from the Lord. The Supreme Ruler took this method of executing sentence on a noted criminal under the administration of His moral

government of the world. It is not Eglon's personal sins as a *man* that are here referred to so much, as his crimes in his public character as the King of Moab, and the long-known oppressor of God's people. To oppress any people without cause was a crime of itself; but Eglon was chargeable with something incomparably more heinous. He had dared to attack the people whom Jehovah had set apart for Himself, to be His own, to be His jewels, to be called by His name, and to be entrusted with the high duty of holding up that name for the reverence of the world. That people were the custodiers of the Divine honour, and their history was inseparably associated with the promotion of the Divine glory in the earth. To attempt to crush such a people, as Eglon had done, was to challenge the majesty of Israel's King as their Protector; it was to stretch forth his hand against the Lord's annointed; it was to maltreat the beloved children of the living God; it was to lay unholy hands on the sacred property of the Most High; it was to waste the church of the living God, an object incomparably dearer to Him than heaven and earth.

For such a crime Pharaoh and all his host had been cast like a millstone into the the sea. From the days of the redemption from Egyptian bondage onwards, every other potentate that had dared to lift a hand against this people had been ground to the dust. And now here was this Prince of Moab not only trampling them under foot, but taking occasion thereby to magnify his own gods, as superior to the great "I am" of the oppressed Israel. This contempt of the Divine name, and the treading down as the mire of that people whom God so dearly loved, constituted Eglon's special crimes. It is for the Judge of all the earth to decide as to the *time*, the *form*, and the *means*, whereby any transgressor under His government shall be punished. Pharaoh He overthrew in the waters of the Red Sea. The Canaanites He wasted by the sword of Joshua. The ringleader in the sin of Baalpeor was put to death by the javelin of Phinehas. And now the head of the Moabitish nation must meet death at the hand of Ehud, the man whom God has raised up to deliver His chosen Israel. If such a proceeding should be thought harsh, what shall we say of the hundreds of thousands of Canaanites who were put to death so sternly and unrelentingly, that in all the cities attacked not a man, woman, or child was left to breathe. This was done by Jehovah's express command on account of the extremely heinous character of their sins. And if such a spectacle is justifiable, where vast multitudes become victims, it is a comparatively insignificant matter to hear of the same thing being done where only a solitary individual is concerned.

But there is no cruelty, or barbarity in either case. Rather in such cases we see the Righteous Governor among the nations giving to the wicked the due reward of their deeds. Should the punishment inflicted seem to us appalling, the natural and wise inference is, that there must be something correspondingly awful in that which could have brought down such a doom upon them, at the hands of so merciful and just a God. If men wonder at the terrible nature of the *calamity*, which is not only permitted, but appointed, in such a case, to take place, why should they not equally wonder at the terrible character of the *cause* which has gone before—*the greatness of the sins committed*? Men are so accustomed to the exercise of God's forbearing mercy, that they forget what is due to the majesty of His great name. They reflect not, that in conducting His holy government, He must, before all other things, maintain the purity of His own character as God, His authority as Supreme Ruler in His own universe, and give specimens of how He will, sooner or later, visit with just indignation flagrant and long-continued sin. To show forth God's glory, by making His universe a scene of holiness and happiness, was the grand end for which all things were made, and not to suit men's wishes by sparing them though running on to any length in a career of sin, and forgetfulness of Him to whom they owe

their being. Men's wishes are not the principal element that guides the formation of God's purposes; and though He will never forget the length and breadth of His tender mercies in His dealings with men, what is due to His own character as God will ever form His first consideration in the moral government of His intelligent creatures.

It does seem strange, that many persons who write on this subject, and attempt to account for the tragic character of this death, should make little or no mention of the *heinous character of the sins* of him on whom the judgment fell. May we not suppose that, to fix the eye on the atrocious aspect which this man's sin presented to the God of Israel, was the real reason why the naked narrative is allowed to stand as it is, without any farther explanation? All the spectacles of mourning and woe in this world are simply the natural consequences of sin. If the woe be so dreadful, even though it is but the beginning of sorrows, how dreadful in God's estimation must be the character of the sin of which it is the index!

But to rise for a moment to *the higher view of God's method of acting in His government of this world.* Human life is justly reckoned more precious in this age of advanced civilisation than it was in the days of Ehud, and especially under the light of a much longer and fuller experience of the value of Scriptural truth, than the early fathers had. Yet, however revolting to us the act of assassinating the King of Moab may seem; though we regard as truly terrible the massacre of whole Canaanitish peoples, the aged and the feeble, the women and the children, as well as those who could carry arms; and though we are appalled at the slaying of all the first-born in the land of Egypt in one night, or at the destruction of a formidable Assyrian army at one fell stroke—all these are but temporary specimens of Jehovah's jealousy for the honour of His holy name, and fall far short of the height of that eternal monument which He has set up in sight of heaven and earth in the cross of Christ, as a spectacle to be looked at by all, where every eye may read, through everlasting ages, the real estimate in which He holds His own glorious perfections, the measure of reverence which is due to Him as God, and His unalterable determination not to lower His standard in judging of the evil of sin, but to give it a treatment to the full as it deserves, *whatever sacrifice it may cost!*

To sum up: We regard this act of Ehud as the infliction by Jehovah's direction, of a special retribution on the head of the heathen monarch, for having dared to insult the majesty of the God of Israel, and for having oppressed the people that were called by his name. But though clearly justifiable as having been commanded of God, it is yet to be viewed as *one of those special events that seldom happen*, and form almost a class by themselves. It is on no account to be held as a warrant, or precedent, to authorise any one, however zealous, for God's cause, to rise up against a blasphemer of God's name, or a persecutor of God's people, in any other age, and put him to death in like manner. For Ehud did nothing of himself, but only as he was commanded of God—God alone has the right to punish the adversaries of His own truth.

It is also to be particularly noted that *this event belongs to the history of the Old Testament period*, which takes its complexion throughout from the fact, that the great atonement had not yet been made, and that God, in all His dealings with man, acted as the unpropitiated deity. Hence a certain aspect of sternness and rigour in the divine dispensations, which disappears when the great sacrifice on Calvary has been offered. In that sacrifice, so grand an exhibition has been made of "the righteousness of God" with all its claims, and such security has been taken against all possible lowering of the standard of the evil of sin, that there is not now the same necessity for displays of the divine anger against men's wickedness or for heavy judgments occurring in Providence to manifest God's jealousy, as did exist in the anti-christian age. Though sin itself be the same

still—ever hateful to a holy God, and though it is attended now with even higher aggravations than under the former economy, so gloriously complete is the satisfaction which has been rendered to the character of Him whose law has been transgressed, that the way is opened for a more benignant exercise of the Divine government among men, and other monuments are not needed to impress men's minds with the terrible evil of sin, and God's determination to punish it as it deserves, so far as the present world is concerned. Hence God's attitude towards men in this the Christian age has in it the character of "the God of peace," because all His transactions with them are done under the shadow of Calvary.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 12–30.

SIN—SUFFERING; PENITENCE AND DELIVERANCE REPEATED.

It is to be noticed that the history of mankind generally, and of this people in particular, is represented in the Bible as always taking place under the observation of God as "King of all the earth." God is the faithful witness and rightful judge. It is His world which men occupy; they are His creatures, made to serve and to glorify Him; His sceptre is over them; and it is before Him, and to Him, that human life is led. Hence it is ever said, the actors, in history, did this or that "*in the sight of the Lord.*" "*The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.*" He is the constant observer of men's conduct. "*The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He pondereth all His goings.*" He looks on men's conduct not merely as a spectator, but as the judge who has to reckon with them at last. It is "He with whom they have to do." To Him all that is is done in human life belongs, and He is the proper judge of it all. To Him men are accountable for all their actions; for was not man brought into existence to show forth God's glory by his love and obedience (1 Sam. ii. 3). It is His prerogative to sit in review of men's actions from day to day, and to pass an absolutely accurate verdict on every man's character and conduct, with the authority of the judgment seat, from which there is no appeal. That man acts wisely who says, "*with me it is a small thing to be judged of you, or of men's judgement; He that judgeth me is the Lord.*" Here we have—

I. New sin added (verse 12).—"*Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord.*" There is emphasis in saying—"did evil *again*." It implies—

1. A painful surprise. After such thorough yet tender dealing on the part of the covenant God, it might have been supposed that the ungodliness of the people would have been effectually cured, and that henceforth no accounts would have been heard, but those of hearty and permanent allegiance to Him, whom they had accepted as their own God. The disease had been so deeply lanced, that it might well have been supposed to be now entirely eradicated, and that we should hear no more of Israelitish apostacy. What long suffering had been shown! What arguments of loving kindness and tender mercy used! What faithfulness in using the rod rather than permit them to continue the infatuation of sleeping on in sin! But alas! for the inconstancy and shallowness of human good resolutions apart from the grace of God! Here they are, sinning as before, in the sight of God's holy heavens, as if "*the Lord did not see, and the God of Jacob did not regard.*" After being crushed to the very dust under the weight of Divine chastisements, they yet show themselves capable, when the pressure of the Divine hand is removed, of committing over again the same fatal error, of going astray from the living and true God. But we have the same truth

in every part of human history. Go back to the days of the great deluge. We have the same account given of the human heart *after* that catastrophe as *before* (comp. Gen. viii. 21, with vi. 5)—or, come forward to our own times, and after all the superior advantages enjoyed, and greatly multiplied arguments used, the same melancholy truth comes out, that men are by nature "bent to backsliding" from the living and true God. After their long chapter of sad experiences, this people "did evil again in the sight of the Lord."

2. Deeper guilt. It was heinous sin to apostatise the first time. It was greatly more aggravated sin to do it a second time. On many accounts it was so. It showed more deliberation in the act of rebellion, more stubbornness of will, and greater defiance of the Divine Authority. It also implied the heavy guilt of despising all the argument involved in the close and faithful dealing God had with them, in the terrible chastisements He had already brought down on their heads. To what purpose had all the severe remedies been made use of if the old evil should now break out again? Had the faithful use of the rod, by the wise and kind Father, in the awful scourge of the Syrian invasion, for eight years been wholly in vain? And must the same drastic process be gone through again, ere the cancerous spot be removed? Fearful was the guilt of this people to forget their sacred character so far, as "a holy nation and a peculiar people," dedicated to the service of God by so many hallowed ties, as even once to cross the line between fealty and apostacy; but what shall we say of their daring to lift an unhallowed foot in that direction again, notwithstanding all the entreaties, warnings, and chastisements used to prevent them, by their gracious and long-suffering God? This was a systematic despising of the voice of their God.

3. A perplexing problem to solve. Why should the children of such holy men as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob become such incorrigible rebels? This is the puzzle that meets us everywhere in the history of God's Israel. Greater obstinacy in sin, or more wilful persistence in forsaking a holy and loving God, could hardly be found among the worst of the heathen nations. How then can we account for such a tendency among the descendants of the most pious stock that ever existed in the history of our humanity, and who, if any, might be expected to be an honour to our race, for their strictly religious character, and entire consecration to the keeping of God's commandments? Some reasons, indeed, may be assigned for the present apostacy.

(1) **The people had lost their leader.** We hear of no outbreak of the tendency to go after other gods, so long as he was alive. Had he been at the helm of affairs now, there is little doubt how he would have acted. Swift and sure would have been the steps he would have taken to restore the spirit of reverence for Jehovah's character and law throughout the kingdom. At whatever risk, he would have tolerated no disloyalty to the Divine King. He would have said, "It is not necessary for me to live; it is indispensable that I should be faithful to my God." As a "judge" he was responsible for seeing that the people had at least a visible respect for the covenant of their God. And while he was alive, both by his example and personal influence, not to speak of his authority as judge, he would have deterred many from turning aside to crooked ways. But now that he was gone no barrier remained to the bursting of the banks of the river, so that, almost at once, idolatry again reached the floodmark among the chosen people!

(2) **Apostasy was due in part to the universal evil example.** It is not easy to withstand the force of the current when surrounded by a multitude of waters. While the whole human race around them were moving strongly in one direction, it was hard for a single nation to stand out by itself, and dare to be singular. This may in part account for the fact, though it does not afford the slightest

justification of the lapse into idolatry. If, on the one side the temptation was strong, the motives on the other side were incomparably stronger. The word and character of their God ought infinitely to have outweighed every other consideration; but to this had to be added the long course of gracious and solemn dealing He had had with them, from the beginning of their history onwards. Besides this general consideration, their aspostacy was inexcusable, on the ground of the strong representation of the dangers arising from giving way to it, and the many helps and encouragements supplied for maintaining their stedfastness in the covenant. The greatest care also was taken to make them live apart from "the world lying in wickedness." Israel was to "dwell safely, being alone" (Deut. xxxiii. 28.) Thus too is it with the people of God in every age. When they are separate from the world they are safe; when they are in it, they are in danger (2 Cor. vi. 17; 1 Cor. xv. 33; Acts ii. 40, 44; Prov. xiii. 20; Ps. xxvi. 8, 9; ci. 4—7; Eph. v. 11).

(3) **Idolatry was their easily-besetting sin.** While all sin is strong in a sinful nature, there is a specially enslaving power in an "easily-besetting sin." By it a man is led captive, even when his eyes are open to the terrible consequences which must come out in the end. He is like a captive in chains. Idolatry had a fascination for the eye of the Israelite. It allowed him free indulgence in all the corrupt propensities of his fallen nature. In one word, it allowed him to make his God after his own wishes. This was the great allurement to idolatry among mankind everywhere. No wonder if God should say of it, "*Oh, do not this abominable thing which I hate.*" It diverted the homage of the creature from being given to the Creator, and led to its being bestowed on the meanest and most grovelling things. Yet it presented to man the form of a religion, and gave room for the exercise of the devout feelings of the heart—so satisfying the craving for a religion which exists in man's nature. Such a system kept the Israelite abreast of the religious fashion of the age. He did not require to be singular, and look sourly on every other form of religious worship that was practised among the nations.

(4) **A new generation had sprung up.** It was not the same generation that saw the great deliverance which God had wrought by Othniel. It was a new generation that had not seen God's mighty works, on behalf of Israel, with their own eyes. Their fathers in all likelihood told them much of the glorious past, and they would listen with interest to the thrilling accounts; but not having personally passed through the scenes described, and regarding them only as matter of hearsay, they would be looked on as little better than beautiful shadows. Out of this circumstance would sin deceitfully construct an apology. The impression made by a bare recital is indeed not of so vivid a character as when one personally passes through the excitement of great perils, and is an eye-witness to sublime deliverances wrought. Yet the bare recital, accompanied by irrefragable evidence of the truth, and astonishing character of the wonders accomplished, was sufficient to inspire the most thorough belief, and to call forth earnest gratitude and devout obedience. It is thus that God always reckons—that after generations should give Him their allegiance and confidence, because of mercies which He has bestowed on generations that have gone before, of which an account is given to those that come after. The whole series of generations He views as hanging together, both as regards duties, and as regards privileges. He never addresses any one generation as if it stood apart from all the rest. Links are always supposed to exist, binding the whole in one—links of duty—of a common heritage—of a common example, instruction, and interest. They are always addressed as one people, allied in blood, as children of one father, heirs of the same promises, and partakers of the same Divine covenant-relationship, with its laws, and ordinances, and privileges, and hopes. The men of this backsliding generation, therefore, were verily guilty in not having been fully confirmed in

their allegiance to God by the argument derived from the experience of the fathers. (See pp. 92-94.)

(5) **The inveterate depravity of the human heart.** This is too truly the principal reason that accounts for the apostacy of Israel from their God. Nothing could more strikingly bring out the fact of this inveterate depravity than the truth that in all ages, under all circumstances, and among all peoples, the heart shows an invariable tendency to depart from the living God. The tendency indeed shows itself with all the force and regularity of a law, and hence we read of "*the law of sin.*" We have also the distinct testimony of Scripture, "*The Lord looked down from heaven on the children of men to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside—there is none that doeth good; no, not one.*" This testimony is given twice over (Ps. xiv. and liii.). A melancholy confirmation of the testimony we have in the history recorded in the book of Judges. Of Israel it may be said that "though woo'd and aw'd" they are "rebels still." "Neither ministry, nor miracle, nor misery, nor mercy, could mollify their hard hearts, or contain them within the bounds of obedience." [*Trapp.*] The unqualified verdict of Him who searcheth the heart is, that it is "desperately wicked"—or incurable by any natural means. Alas! for the honour of our race, that it should pass into a proverb "*humanum est peccare,*" and yet this is mild compared with the Divine verdict.

II. New chastisement inflicted (verses 12–14). — "*The Lord strengthened Eglon against Israel,*" etc.

1. **The Lord chastises in faithfulness** (pp. 118, 119). In all circumstances God marks sin with His abhorrence. As He would be faithful to Himself, He must keep up a due sense of His sovereign authority, and the unsullied purity of His character and government, before the eyes of His creatures. According to an established arrangement with His people (Ps. lxxxix. 30–34), He gives them to understand, it is due both to Him and to them, that they should be chastised when they sin against Him. He afflicts them to show His jealousy for His holy name; that He is deeply offended with sin even in His own people; that He cannot love them at the expense of His own glory as a holy God; that He cannot allow them to go on in sin at the expense of sacrificing their best interests; that He cannot trifle with that which would poison their happiness, and sap the foundations of their future good. By chastisement, too, He reminds them that sin implies loss of character, as well as loss of favour; that it brings them under the Divine frown, and sinks them in the scale of honour. And finally He afflicts them, to bring them quickly to a state of penitence and reformation of conduct. He impresses it on them, that while they continue to sin, He must continue to punish; and that if, after all His dealings with them, "*they will not hearken, but walk contrary to Him, then He will walk contrary unto them in fury, and chastise them seven times for their sins.*" The standard of His holiness as absolutely perfect must not be let down, in the estimation of the subjects of His government, however clamantly certain circumstances may seem to call for a relaxation. His moral government, even of a sinful world, must go on without a stain, notwithstanding that so much sin is ever being committed. How that could be so, consistently with His vast designs of mercy, was a problem for His Divine wisdom to solve. And in the great sacrifice of Calvary, we see the purity and righteousness of the Divine character kept up, for ever, at an absolute height. But as there is need, in every age, for some immediate expression of the Divine displeasure, in the case of individual sins as they are committed, this is supplied by chastisements, both to remind us of

the sin-hating character of our God, and to be a check on farther indulgence in sin.

When sin is committed afresh, after the application of costly means of cure, men would be disposed to give up the case in despair, or to inflict summary vengeance once for all on the transgressors. God does neither; but with a patience which is calm and regular as the laws of nature, He proceeds again in the same course which has already proved abortive; and for many times he does so, to show the glory of His long-suffering, and the multitude of His mercies (Ps. cvi. 43-45).

2. He makes use of a new rod. It is not the same scourge that is now employed. A nation by their side is raised up, apparently one of the weakest of the surrounding nations, certainly one that hitherto had been too much awed by the mighty hand, and outstretched arm of the God of Israel, to dare to meet them in battle array. Moab now becomes "the rod of God's anger" to chastise his people for their unfaithfulness to His covenant. For the greater part of a hundred years, they had longed to wreak their vengeance on this much hated people, but hitherto had lacked courage and opportunity. Now both are supplied, and with eager foot, they tread the soil of Israel, for purposes of plunder and oppression. God's quiver is full of arrows, and it is glorifying to Him to show the fulness of His resources, by using a variety of instruments to execute His will. It proves His universal supremacy to make choice now of one, now of another nation, in turn all round, to serve His purpose—not always the most suited, but though the most unfit, yet made by Him most successful in gaining the end. (See pp. 88, 89).

3. He sends a more severe token of His displeasure. When a man has had the character of having been a transgressor in the past, and is brought up anew, charged with crime at the bar of justice, it must go harder with him, than if he had been spotless before. For now he shows more settledness of purpose as a criminal, and greater persistence in defying constituted authority. Thus it was with Israel. Theirs was now a case of sin added to sin. The old sin was remembered when the new sin was committed, and the guilt was accounted to be much greater than before, calling for many stripes. We do not know indeed, that the oppression of the Moabites was heavier than that of the Mesopotamian hordes. Probably there was not much to choose between them. But it was certainly much longer continued. Now it is 18 years of servitude, whereas formerly it was but eight years. In this respect, the scourge was much more severe, not only because the lash was longer applied, but also because God showed that His ear was more heavy to hear their prayer. It was also a deeper humiliation to be trodden upon by a people whom till now they had despised, from their birth onwards, and who had been accustomed for more than three generations to tremble at the name, and the mention of the God of Israel. "It must have been most mortifying to Israel to see Jericho, the very city which had been delivered into their hands by a miracle, now made a Moabite stronghold to guard the passes of Jordan, and to keep Israel down in lasting subjection. Now, too, their old enemies, Ammon and Amalek join against them. Their adversaries seem to flock together to crush them (Ps. lxxxiii. 5–8). They would not serve the Lord with their corn, wine, and oil, which He had given them; so now they must serve the oppressor, and pay him tribute of all (Hosea ii. 5–10; Deut. xxviii. 47, 48.)"

As to their groanings under the yoke, the history is silent. These we can only imagine; but doubtless they implied a deep sense of degradation as well as suffering. *This feature of passing over details in silence* adds greatly to the sadness of the history of so many victims of oppression, in various countries of the world, in the terrible past. How much more miserable has this world been

in its numerous wretched homes, than the world itself knows! What heavy clouds of sorrow have discharged their contents on these homes at various epochs, of which no record has been kept! Had that portion of the history of our race which has been left untold, been given in full on the printed page, in what red and dark colours must the pen have been dipped, suitably to pourtray the facts! How many heart-rending cries have gone up before high heaven, which no human ear has heard, from the wretched, down-trodden subjects of tyrannical and despotic rulers in the ages of the mournful past, not only among savage nations, but those also that are the so-called civilised! We need not conjecture what sufferings must have been endured but never told, under the iron hands of such incarnations of cruelty, as Jenghis Khan and Tamerlane, of Tartar notoriety, or the occupants of the throne of the great Mogul; but were the history of it written, what tales of misery might be given to the world from the prisons of Europe, the mines of Siberia, the slave-grounds of Africa and America, and the manifold homes of oppression and hardship in lands which have been ruled over by capricious and cruel monarchs! What cries of bleeding, tortured, mangled humanity have been raised which no ear of sympathy has ever listened to, save that of Him who "*looks down from heaven to hear the groaning of the prisoners*," to mark the oppression of the poor, and the sighing of the needy, and who will appear in due time "*to judge the world in righteousness, and the people with equity!*"

4. He helps His enemies against His own people. "*He strengthened Eglon against Israel*," etc. How He did so we are not informed, but in Providence He so ordered it that all Eglon's schemes and efforts should succeed, while disastrous failure attended all the movements of Israel. On a former occasion, while the Lord was with His people, Balak had no power to curse them, or to lift a finger against them; but now Jehovah not only permits the heathen king to triumph, but Himself actually takes the side of the enemy against His own. How deep must have been the provocation given, when the Divine Father proceeds to take the part of a ruthless stranger, in the enslavement and degradation of His own son! It was even worse. It was giving up His well-beloved child, whom He had so tenderly cared for all along, to be savagely beaten by a slave; while He, the Father, stands by, not to protect Him from chastisement, but rather to see that a sufficient number of stripes is given! This is the same God, who was always so ready to exalt the horn of Israel, in opposition, or in preference to, all others! How great the offence which He must have taken at Israel's sins! Yet this mysterious dealing of the God of Jacob was really a blessing in disguise. Seeming to work against them, He was by this course all the more effectually working for them. He was casting the metal into the fire to get the dross consumed. He was thus opening their eyes, and leading them to see that things must be fearfully out of course, when their God deemed it necessary to join Himself to their enemies. It was God fulfilling, in part, the awful threatening which He had long ago made in the days of Moses (Lev. xxvi. 28), when He would walk contrary to them in like manner as they had walked contrary to Him. In short, it was lifting the veil of warning in time, to prevent the fearful issue of being for ever cast off.

III. New expressions of penitence (verse 15).—"*The children of Israel cried unto the Lord.*"

1. In distress they flee to the universal refuge. As when a ship is overtaken by a great storm at sea, those who sail in it either cast anchor, or betake themselves to some accessible harbour of refuge, so these Israelites in their extremity fell back on the Divinely-established means of relief in *prayer*. Taught by a bitter experience that "the ways of transgressors are hard," the

unfaithful Church soliloquises in her bondage thus—"I will go and return to my first husband; for then it was better with me than now." Prayer is indeed a refuge for all. It is the instinctive cry of the creature to Him who made it, when feeling its feebleness, its wants, its perils, above all its sins and their threatening consequences. "Should not a people seek unto their God?" "Is any afflicted? let him pray."

Prayer is the cry of the heart in returning to its God. It is a refuge *for all.* "*O thou that hearest prayer, to thee shall all flesh come*" (Isa. lvi. 7). While we are in the land of the living, we are in the place of hope, and on praying ground. While the gospel trumpet blows, prayer is never shut against the guilty during the day of human life. For all classes, mercy's gate in prayer stands open—at all times, and under all circumstances. God is said to sit on a "throne of grace" to receive all the petitioners who come to Him. By whatever name miserable men are known, it is the privilege of all to come to this throne, before which a brother-man as mediator between God and man continually pleads.

As the "Creator" of all, God finds an interest in every living being. As the "Father of mercies," He is "kind even to the evil and unthankful." Rejoicing in the consciousness of His own fulness, He is naturally disposed to supply the wants of the needy. As being Himself the "ever-blessed God," He finds pleasure in diffusing happiness among His creatures around Him. But it is a guilty world that He has before Him, and a special mode of approach is established. Christ as sacrifice and intercessor is the way. "Through Him we all have access by one Spirit, unto the Father."

The voice which Christianity raises among the abodes of our suffering humanity, is one, not only of hope, but of assurance, that the God in whose hands we are, is disposed to listen to all the cries and plaints that come from distressed hearts. The notion of the ancient Epicureans, who represented the Deity as indolently reposing in His own high region of undisturbed happiness, careless of what might pass among men under His footstool, on whom He could hardly deign to look, has long since been exploded as a dream of the murky nights which brooded over men, ere yet the "Day-spring from on high" began to gleam on their dwellings of sorrow. Abortive, too, have proved the efforts of the men of cold intellect, during the past, and a portion of the present century, who would represent the Deity as dwelling apart from men amid the unapproachable splendours of His own heavens, having cut off every tie with His creatures, regarding their history as too insignificant to engage His attention, and their interests too unimportant to claim His aid. On the contrary, Christianity teaches that "*The Lord looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth, and considereth all their works; that He is good unto all and His tender mercies are over all His works; that the eyes of all wait on Him, He opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing; that His eye is on the righteous, and His ear is open unto their prayer; that He is the helper of the fatherless, relieveth the widow, preserveth the strangers, and looseth the prisoners*"—in one word, that He is "*The preserver of all men specially of them that believe.*" To this God all men are taught to pray, coming with penitent hearts, and asking, in the name of Christ, for such things as may be agreeable to His will.

2. They had a special plea with God as children of the Covenant. The plea which men had with God merely as His creatures, is lost on their becoming sinners. "*For we know that God heareth not sinners.*" He cannot continue to be the Father of apostate children. He cannot bless the guilty, till some great thing is done to dispose of their guilt. But this people were adopted by God into the relation of Father and children, on the ground of the covenant He had

been pleased to establish with them; and thus though by nature "far off" from God, they were "made nigh." The great promise, "*I will be a God to thee,*" went with them as a pillar of hope in all the steps of their wonderful history. And however often they might come with their requests to His throne, He was never weary of remembering the word of His covenant, and acting according to it in all the difficulties through which they had to pass. "*I said not to the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain.*"

3. Their temporary apostasy did not shut them out from the privilege of prayer. It might be said, that if men as God's creatures, lost their title to call God Father because of their sins, for the same reason, these children of the covenant ought to be held as having lost all title to any of the blessings of the covenant. This would have been the case but for two reasons; (1) They had a mediator to plead for them in their priesthood, and the continual sacrifices were laid on the altar, as the means of propitiating. (2) Their apostasy was not allowed by their covenant God to become permanent. For if so, they must, in the nature of things, necessarily have forfeited every title they had to God's favour and promised blessings, on the ground of their sacred relationship. That is, God must have cast them off. In these latter times the most solid and permanent security is taken that the privileges and blessings reserved for the people of God shall not be lost—prayer included. The rule which is laid down objectively reads thus: "*If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous.*" "*We have a Great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God: let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace,*" etc. No case that is once fairly put into the hands of that advocate can be considered hopeless For "He is able to save to the uttermost," etc. And we have "*boldness to enter into the holiest, by a new and living way, even by the blood of Jesus, which He hath consecrated for us,*" etc. And there is provision made subjectively also. "*I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever.*" What is the force of this but practically saying, on the one hand, if the Spirit is given, no other blessing can be withheld; and such arrangement is everlasting; while, on the other, it is doing the same thing as "*putting God's laws into the mind, and writing them in the heart,*" so that the most effectual security is taken for the fulfilling of the condition of the covenant, and so it is established for evermore.

IV. New Deliverances experienced (verses 15–30).—For an account of this we must read the narrative, and mark how providence overruled events so as to secure the complete emancipation of the people from their state of vassalage. The point to be noticed is, that the hand of the Lord specially directed the events to this issue.

1. This deliverance came in answer to prayer. Thus is it best seen, that all is "of Him, through Him, and to Him," and so it is the mode most glorifying to God. It is the fixed rule—"Ask, and ye shall receive." Acknowledge the Fountainhead. "When the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, He raised up a deliverer." His compassion and tender mercy would prompt Him to save them at the mere spectacle of their misery, but to maintain His character as the Holy One of Israel, He grants deliverance only in answer to their professions of return to God, and suitable expressions of their sorrow for sin. Their professions in most cases might be only in appearance, and in only a few cases might there be "that godly sorrow for sin which needeth not to be repented of." The majority of the people may only have done what they did in Hosea's days—"howled to God on their beds," without crying to Him with their hearts (Hosea vii. 14). Yet God is pleased to see even the appearance

of penitence, and in cases where temporal blessings are concerned, He often gives these though there should be nothing more than the appearance (1 Kings xxi. 27-29). There is however, in every age "a remnant"—"the living in Jerusalem"—"the Israelites indeed"—"the tenth"—who "follow the Lord fully," and whose "hearts are circumcised." These would now act the part of Ezra (Ezra ix. 6), or of David (Ps. li. 17).

2. **It was brought about by a suitable instrument.** God Himself made the selection. "He raised him up." As a particular description is given of him, the features of that description must he held to indicate the reason of his fitness to serve as an instrument for accomplishing the Divine purpose. It was a man who wanted the natural use of his right hand, and had only left to him the effective use of his left. He seems likely to have been among the last who could do any great thing by his own power. And his fitness seems to have consisted rather in his defects, than in his powers. God at one time chooses one that is specially gifted, at another one that is defective, to show that He can do his work with any kind of instrument. For while a man's natural gifts are not despised, but made use of so far as they can be of service, it is not so much by these that he succeeds in discharging his mission, as by the special aid given him by the Spirit of God. "Not by might, nor by power," etc.

The manner of the Deliverance. We believe the *manner of accomplishment*, as well as *the end to be gained*, were matter of Divine direction to Ehud. He was commissioned to deliver Israel from Moabitish bondage. This was to be accomplished.

(1) **By the death of the King.** The oppressor was marked to die. Eglon had served God's purpose in being a rod wherewith to chastise His children, and now that the purpose is served, there being no further need for it, He casts it into the fire. [*Trapp*]. How many illustrations of this kind occur throughout history! All the nations round about the ancient Israel so suffered in the end, because of the injuries or indignities they inflicted on the people of God. How many examples might be found among the kingdoms or powers of Europe during the Christian era, who once persecuted the church of God, and have had troubles and degradation in their future history. For it is specially to be noticed that whilst a valuable purpose was served by the chastisement of the backsliding church, that was as far as possible away from the intention of these persecuting powers. Their only thought was partly to gratify their malice against a religion which they intensely hated, and so they strove to put it down; and partly to extend their own power and possessions. To do this at the expense of the interests of the church of God, was to offer an insult and defiance to Him to whom the church belonged.

Eglon's sins, therefore, were not merely, that he had acted the part of a public robber, in seizing the property which belonged to another nation, and that as a tyrant and oppressor he had for a great length of time filled the homes of that nation with misery and wailing. *But he had dared to stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed*—a sin which even David shrunk from after he had himself been anointed, and when the object was the wicked Saul, whom the Lord had now rejected, from being king. Because this monarch had been chosen to the sacred office of being king over God's people, and so had the Divine seal set upon him in that office, David preferred to risk his own life rather than do harm to one whose person had thus become consecrated. It was therefore a grave crime of which Eglon had been guilty, for Israel had been thus consecrated, and so were regarded by their God as sacred property. Their name He had associated in the most intimate manner with His own great name. By them, and their history, was His name known on the earth. In attacking such a people, Eglon was virtually making war upon Jehovah

Himself! A worm of the dust was defying the Omnipotent at arms! God's jewels he had been appropriating to himself, and treating them as if they were the merest dross! Eglon, though himself an alien, had dared for so long a time to treat God's dear children as if they had been the veriest slaves! This was the same people before whose march God had dried up the sea, and rolled back Jordan when in full flood; whose sustenance in the desert, for He had caused the rock to gush forth streams, and the heavens above to rain down manna; before whom every nation in Canaan, from the one end to the other, had been either annihilated or paralysed, and who still lay under the shelter of the same Almighty arm.

Now the time was come for delivering Israel, and at the same hour, Eglon's sins come into remembrance before God, not having been repented of, nor a pardon given. Hence the sentence goes forth that the oppressor of God's Israel must die, and His ransomed ones be set free from the yoke, while Ehud is the man appointed to execute the work.

(2.) **Special qualifications were given to the instrument chosen.**

(*a.*) We hold it to be a rule, that in all cases where God sends a man on a special mission, *He both qualifies and directs him more or less in the discharge of the duties of that mission.* Many have felt a difficulty in supposing that God had given instructions to Ehud in the present case, because there seems to be a cold-blooded and deliberate murder committed, with circumstances of treachery and lying accompanying it. But we have already seen, that before God, Eglon's death was not regarded as murder, or the unlawful taking away of life, but a just retribution on a daring criminal, under the Divine government, for his great sins, at a point when the time had come for the emancipation of his vassals, and for the infliction of his own doom as their oppressor.

(*b.*) *Objection* as to the charge of *duplicity and deceit*, our judgment must be guided by the interpretation we put on the narrative itself. To us the main features of the story are consistent with perfect honesty of purpose and truthfulness of statement. His principal statements are, "I have a secret errand unto thee, O King," and "I have a message from God unto thee." It has been generally supposed, that by this he meant *some statement which he was to make in words, which was used as a mere blind to gain for him admission into the royal presence, and also to deceive the king and throw him off his guard.* But why make any such supposition? We believe Ehud sincerely meant what he said. He *had* a message from God to deliver, but it was one of *deeds* not *words*. He meant to say, "I have come with a message from that God against whom you have so dreadfully sinned, whose name you have blasphemed, whose people you have trampled on, and whose power you have defied; and that message is, that your hour is come, and you are doomed by my hand to die! There is no strain in this interpretation; it seems most natural, and yet it vindicates the uprightness of Ehud throughout the transaction. That Eglon put another interpretation on the words is beside the question. He was already a doomed man before Ehud's visit, and had no right to any mercy shown. Already he had had a long day of mercy, and the last moment had now expired. From Ehud's words he was given distinctly to understand *whence* and *why* the blow came that stretched him a corpse at his feet.

(*c.*) On Ehud rested the spirit of *loyalty to his God.* He was specially called by God to be the saviour of his people, who formed at that time the only church of God in the world. Like as God said to Saul, "Go and smite Amalek, and spare them not; slay man and woman, infant and suckling," or like as Joshua was commanded concerning the Canaanites and other nations, "thou shalt utterly destroy them, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth." So now Ehud received the command, "Go and slay Eglon, the oppressor

of my people, and spare him not." It was a very stern duty that was imposed upon him, both very revolting in itself, and involving the greatest risks to his personal safety. It was, we believe, the last thing which he would have chosen to do, if it had been left to himself to decide. But believing that all God's commands were in truth and uprightness, he went forward in Joshua-like spirit at the call of duty. It was, indeed, not a duty of so bewildering a character as that imposed on Abraham, when required to offer up his only son as a burnt offering, yet it was a severe test of his loyalty to his God, and his staunchness to the call of duty.

(*d.*) *He had the spirit of self-sacrifice for the cause of God on earth.* He had to discharge this duty alone. "Of the people there was none with him." He dismissed all that accompanied him on his first visit to the king. He kept the secret locked up in his own bosom. He prepared the instrument of death unknown to others; and every step of the omnious journey was undertaken alone. Other "judges" were commanded to raise an army, generally one far inferior in number and equipment to the force of the enemy. But in such a case there is something, however little it might be, to sustain natural courage. But here there is nothing. Only such is the will of his God; and the end to be gained is the liberation of his country, and, what was to him more important still, the preservation of the Church of God on the earth. And for that he risks all. Since not only the well-being, but the very existence, of the cause of God on the earth depended on his going through with the perilous duty entrusted to him, he takes his life in his hand, and without a murmur proceeds to discharge it. He stood the test of zeal for the holy cause in which he was embarked.

(*e.*) *He had the spirit of great boldness and courage.* Many such cases stand out in history, such as that of the Roman Seæva, a soldier of Cæsar's, who at the siege of Dyrrachium alone resisted Pompey's army until he had two hundred and twenty darts sticking in his shield. It was said of the great Cæsar that he always said to his soldiers, "Come," never "Go"—meaning that he himself ever went first. It was also said of Hannibal, the Carthagenian general, that he was always first *in* the battle and the last *out*. Truly heroic courage was displayed also by the Swiss Tell, and the Scottish Wallace, and many other great patriots. But in the courage and boldness displayed by these "judges," there was a higher than the natural element. They went forward in a state of absolute fearlessness, conscious that Omnipotence itself was with them, that all obstacles must give way before them, and that success would attend their action with the certainty of a law of nature. Thus moral considerations were at the root of their courage.

(*f.*) *He had the spirit of strong faith.* He believed that God would, by his hand, work a great deliverance; both because he believed that He had such complete control of all events and issues, that He could in any circumstances open a way of escape, and also because he had the conviction that God was with him, and would not fail him. Over all his other armour, this warrior threw "the shield of faith," and so became not only mighty, but invincible. This accounts for all his high qualities, and for his noble bearing throughout the whole occasion. It was by his faith that he obtained a good report. His allegiance to his God, his spirit of self sacrifice for the cause of God, his courage, coolness, zeal, and fearlessness all arise from his strong faith.

When he left his companions and returned alone, the thought which he carried in his heart was the terrible one of taking a life, and that in cold blood. It was too the life of a king surrounded by all the attendants of his household, and chosen troops within easy call. It was a king too who had long been able to crush Ehud's people. It was to be done in open day and in the very heart of the palace. He knew that if he should make the attempt and not

succeed, his own life was certain to be forfeited, and that he would die a very cruel death. He was single handed in the project; he had no backing; nor any place of shelter to flee to. The deed itself was of the most tragic character, and in all but universal estimation, would be reckoned infamous. Even if successful it was fitted to mark his name with a stigma to future ages. Yet he is calm, intrepid, and decided. There is no hesitation, no flurry, not a doubt as to what he should do—not a trace of blanching seen in his countenance, nor a moment's misgiving felt in his heart. He is in no hurry, neither before nor after, nor does he show the slightest discomposure in any of the steps taken. *How do we account for this demeanour?* Was it merely natural courage? Was he a fanatic, or a desperado? Was he nothing more than a patriot in the usual sense of the term? Did he hold human life so cheap, and regard it so legitimate a thing to get rid of tyrants, that he was reckless what means might be used if only the end could be accomplished?

We do not so interpret the character. Ehud, we believe, *acted as a man who felt he had received a sacred commission from Jehovah* to execute judgment, not on a fellow man merely, or on a wicked man, but on one who held the church of God bound down under oppression, and whom it was necessary to get rid of, now that the hour was come for setting the captive free.

(3.) **The Providence of God co-operates in bringing out the issue.** Ehud found remarkable facility in carrying out every step of the process. He might have said, "I came; I saw; I conquered." Not an obstacle remained standing in the way. We hear of no demurring on the part of his companions, that he should return to the city of palm-trees, nor does any suspicion seem to have been awakened among the enemy by his return visit. He had already secured favour at court by the presentation of his handsome gift. The effect of his statement that he had a secret errand to the king (the nature of which he was not bound to explain), was that admission was at once granted to the royal presence, for still there was no suspicion. Nor in Eglon's own mind was there any apprehension of danger, for he gave the signal for their being left alone together. The other circumstances—his never supposing that Ehud came as an enemy, his rising up to meet him, and his not calling aloud for help—all seemed arranged for the successful execution of the project. Ehud's firmness of nerve and coolness of manner, his locking the door of the summer-parlour and abstracting the key, his going down by the privy stairs into the porch, and calmly passing through such of the attendants as might be there, while no suspicion of anything wrong having been done was excited, seemed all to be providentially arranged. And still more striking was the fact, of the attendants waiting so long, before they entertained the thought that something wrong had occurred. Every minute of time during which they waited was most precious to Ehud, for it allowed him to get clear away, not only beyond the boundary stones, but also to escape as far as Mount Ephraim, before any arrangements could be made for pursuit.

Farther, the fact that *no pursuit was made, and that the Moabites were paralysed* from taking any kind of energetic action by the death of their king, specially favoured the success of the scheme. All this was crowned by the activity which was awakened on the other hand in Israel, the spirit of enthusiasm which in a moment took possession of all classes, and the vigour with which they threw themselves on the astonished Moabites, ere they had time to recover from their consternation. In all these items there was not a single interruption to what might be called Ehud's good fortune, or as we interpret it, not a single break in the chain of favouring providential circum-

stances. Had there been only two or three particulars propitious, success might either have not come at all, or have been greatly delayed, and so the hand of God might not have been distinctly traceable in the occurrences. But when so many circumstances hang all together in a chain, and several of them were less likely to have happened than their opposites, while yet every one of them directly favoured the result that was sought, we cannot resist the conviction that all was arranged by the Ruler of Providence to effect the emancipation of his chosen people.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 12–30.

God's Messages.

What constitutes a message from God to any man? Any intimation of His will made, either directly to a single individual alone, or generally to a number of persons together, with individual application to each. It may be made:—(1.) By *words*, written or spoken. (2.) By *Providential events or dealings*. (3.) By *the workings of conscience*, or *impressions made on the mind consistently with right reason*, or it may be in other ways still. Scripture throughout is generally a Book full of messages from God to each individual reader.

I. God's messages are of different kinds.

That now sent from God to Eglon by the hand of Ehud was of a very special character. It was determined altogether by Eglon's relations to the people with whom God's name was intimately associated, and under whose special protection they were. It was one, therefore, of an awful character, corresponding with these two facts, that he had dared to stretch out his hand to crush God's church on earth, and he had dared to blaspheme the name of the Holy One of Israel. Hence, it was a message of doom. But messages addressed to men generally are of all different kinds. In God's word there are messages of:—

1. Reconciliation. Sometimes an individual man is addressed, as in the case of Nicodemus, Zaccheus, or the jailor of Philippi. More frequently men in masses are addressed with a strict application to each distinctly understood. But either way, this message which is sent to all, is the most important of all messages, and gives colour to all. Nothing can be more important for guilty men than to hear that God is willing to receive them back again into His favour, and has actually provided means complete and effectual for their being so received; and that now He *calls* them, *commands* them, and *pleads* with them to become reconciled to Him. The sentiment of 2 Cor. v. 18-21, is not only paralleled by many passages, but is the general drift of God's addresses to men every where in Scripture.

2. Repentance. This is a message which God sends to every man in connection with the message of reconciliation, Matt, iii. 2; iv. 17; Luke, xiii. 3, 5; Acts, xvii. 30; xx. 21, ii. 38; Isa. i. 16-18; Ezek. xviii. 31, 32; also Dan. iv. 27; Jer. iii. 12-14; Ps. xcv. 8; Joel, ii. 12, 13, etc., etc.

3. Faith. That every man all the world over should believe in Christ—is God's message in chief to every reader of the Bible, and every hearer of the preached Gospel. Compliance with that message carries with it compliance with all others. Hence we find this message put in the fore ground in every part of God's word—for the most part addressed to men generally with an individual application, as John vi. 29; v. 24; iii. 16-18, 36; 1 John, v. 11, 12. And this call to believe which is so

often made is always accompanied by the assurance that pardon of sins, peace with God, and the gift of eternal life shall follow the true exercise of faith, John vi. 47; Mark xvi. 16; Rom. v. 1; x. 4; iii. 25, 26.

4. **Life and Salvation.** These appear in many forms, but are all messages from God, properly so called to mankind sinners as such. These are *offers* of pardon, peace, and every blessing through Christ; *invitations* to come to Christ; *calls* to accept of Christ as a Saviour; *promises* to give every blessing from first to last, which the blood of Christ has procured; *entreaties* to accept what is put within our reach; *expostulations* employed to overcome men's backwardness, or reluctance; and *threatenings* made use of when other means fail, so that men may be appealed to on every side of their nature.

5. **Gospel privileges.** Such as:—(1.) *Access* to God, in prayer and otherwise; as Heb. iv. 14–16; x. 19–22; Eph. ii. 18., etc., etc. (2.) *Acceptance* with God. This, along with *pardon*, constitutes justification before God, as in Rom. v. 1; iii. 24; Gal. ii. 16, etc. (3.) *Peace of conscience.* Rom. viii. 1; viii. 6; Phil. iv. 6, 7; Ps. cxix. 165, etc. (4.) *Adoption.* All who receive Christ to become theirs are greatly raised in rank, and cannot be regarded as less than *sons.* Hence, John i. 12; Gal. iv. 4, 5, etc. (5.) *Indwelling of the Holy Spirit.* Gal. iv. 6; Rom. viii. 9, 16, 17; 1 Cor. vi. 19; Gal. v. 25; Eph. v. 18, etc. (6.) *Fruits* and *witnessing* of the Spirit, such as *love, hope, joy, gentleness, humility*, etc. See Gal. v. 22, 23; Rom. viii. 16; 1 John iv. 7, 8; Rom. v. 2, 5; viii. 24; xv. 13; Phil. iv. 4; 1 Cor. xiii. 4–7; 2 Tim. ii. 24; I. Peter v. 5. (7.) *Guidance.* Ps. xxxii. 8; Ps. lxxiii. 24; cvii. 6, 7; Prov. ii. 1–5; Ps. xxxvii. 5; Prov. iv. 13-15; Acts xvi. 6, 7, 9, 10, etc. (8.) *Support and protection.* Ps. xxxvii. 3, 4; xxxiv. 9, 10; Ps. xxiii. 1, 2, 5; lv. 22; Ps. xci.; Ex. xix. 4; Deut. xxxiii. 27–29.

6. **Special tokens of Divine favour.** Given to David in 2 Sam. vii.; to Abraham in Gen. xxii. 15–18; to Jacob in Gen. xxviii. 10–22, and in Gen. xxxii. 28, also Rev. iii. 5, 10, etc.

7. **Deliverances.** Message to Hezekiah in 2 Kings xix. 28, 32–34, 35, 36; Isa. x. 24–34; chariots of fire round about Elisha, 2 Kings vi. 15–17; to Joram, 2 King vii. 1, etc.; to Joram and other two kings, 2 Kings iii. 17, 18; to Joash, King of Israel, 2 Kings xiii. 17, etc.; to Ahab, 1 Kings xviii. 44, Ex. iii. 7–10; to Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. xx. 15, etc.

8. **Messages of warning and threatening** to the false prophet, Jer. xxviii. 16, 17; to Hezekiah, Isa. xxxviii. 1–5; to Pharoah, Gen. xli. 1–8, 25–36; to Eli, 1 Sam. iii. 11–14; to house of Israel, Hos. ii. 6, 7; 2 King viii. 11–13; to Ahaziah, 2 Kings i. 16; also adverse providences, such as sickness, bereavements, defeating of schemes, losses—each and all of which have a voice of reproof, warning or threatening.

9. **Calls to Duty,**—to Saul of Tarsus, Acts ix. 15, 16; xxii. 21; xiii. 2; to Joshua, chap. i. 1–9; to the different Judges; to smite Midian, Num. xxxi. 1–4; to anoint a king, 1 Sam. viii. 7–9, 22; to build a temple, 1 Chron. xxii. 7–11; to build it after captivity, Ezra. i. 1–4; many exhortations to duties.

10. **Commands.** Messages from Moses to Pharaoh, from Ex. iv. 21–23 to chap. xi. 8; all the *Decalogue* in Ex. xx. 3–17; the laws and ordinances given through Moses; all the commands or messages given by the prophets, priests, or kings; many special commands given at different times.

11. **Encouragement to Israel at Red Sea,** Ex. xiv. 15, 16; the name of Israel's God, Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7;

Ebenezer, 1 Sam. vii. 12; comfort, Isa. xl. 1, 2; Isa. lxi. 3–11; chaps. lx., lxii; to Solomon in 1 Kings ix. 2–9; by Haggai, chap. ii. 1–9; Isa. xli. 10; also Ps. xxxiv. 8, 9; Psalms *passim*. Hos. xiv. 4, calls, to *trust, wait, hope*, be *glad, fear*, be *grateful*, be *strong*, etc. in Psalms.

12. Doom. Eglon as here; Cain Gen. iv. 12, 15; Belshazzar, Dan. v.; Pharaoh and Egyptians, Ex. xi. 4–8, and xiv. 13–31, Antediluvians, Gen. vi. 13; Ahab, 1 Kings xxi. 21–24; also chap. xxii. 28–37; Prov. i. 24–31; Prov. xiv. 32; Herod, Acts xii. 21–23.

II. Every man has Divine messages sent to him personally. In the *Gospel*, in the ordinary *Providence* of God, and in the workings of His own *conscience* every man has messages sent to him. Thus Herod's conscience was set to work when he heard of the works done by Jesus. "It is John! it is John!" That good man's blood was on his hands; and every moment he feared some messenger of judgment would visit him from the other world. Mark vi. 16. Thus too did Joseph's brethren feel as to the past. Gen. xlii. 21, 22.

(1.) **God individualises every man.** None are passed over, sooner or later every man hears a voice saying to him, "I have a message from God unto thee." None are lost in the crowd. "Some one hath touched me" said the Saviour, when the multitude thronged around Him. He knew all about every individual that was there; and all over the land where He went, He knew about every case without being told. He knew every individual person on land, as he knew about every individual fish in the sea—where he was, what he was, the life he was leading, and the state of his heart as to receiving or rejecting Christ. He knew Zaccheus—his person, name, character, wants, wishes—all about him, though for the first time He met him on that day when He passed through Jericho. And he addressed him accurately. So does He with all—no inaccurate messages. In God's vast universe there is not an object great, or small but He knows in its place.

(2.) **The wise thing for every man is to act as if he were the only person dealt with.** As the Judge dealt with the first culprit, so does He deal still with all culprits. "Adam! where art thou?" every man should count on having his conduct as narrowly scanned, and his purposes and motives as fully known, as if he were the only subject of God's moral government in the world. We are expressly told that at the final reckoning, "*every one of us shall give an account of himself unto God.*" It follows that every one *now* must regard the great message of salvation as sent to him personally, the same as if he were the only person addressed. Men may be addressed in masses, but they are saved only as individuals. Multitudes came around the Saviour, and He spake to them all together, yet the good experienced by each individual hearer depended entirely on how he heard for himself. Of the thousands that were sometimes present, every individual felt that the message was for him equally as if he had formed the sole auditor—the eye of the Master was upon his heart, and the finger of the Speaker was pointed to him, saying, "Thou art the man!" And on the solemn day of account, every hearer will be singled out and dealt with by the judge as if he were the only person placed at the bar.

(3.) **The messages are framed so as to have always an individual application.** "Ho! *every one* that thirsteth;" "come ye—*he* that hath no money, come;" "incline *your* ear and come;" "hear (*thou*) and *your soul* shall live;" "if *any man* thirst let *him* come to Me," etc.; "if *any man* hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to *him*," etc.; "*him* that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out;" believe (*thou*) in the Lord Jesus Christ and *thou* shalt be saved;" "*he* that believeth shall be saved," etc.; "whosoever will, let him take," etc.

III. God's messages are always to be reverently received. What Mary said to the servants at the marriage is still said to all who have the privilege of

hearing Christ's voice—"Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." "*Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*" This was the final conclusion to which the wise man was brought in all his meditations. "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that keep His commandments.*" All God's messages are "holy, just, and good," most reasonable and wise, never *against* but always *for* our interests. And a solemn caution is given respecting the manner in which God's messages should be received. "*If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.*" Every message from the officer must be obeyed implicitly by the soldier, otherwise the battle cannot be won; and he would be treated as a deserter from duty if he did not yield such obedience. The farmer must obey the messages he receives from God, in the laws of nature, if he would reap a harvest in due season. The child must obey the messages, or rules for his guidance, which his father lays down for him, all through his early life, if he would receive in the long run the great promise annexed to the Fifth Commandment. To "hearken to God's voice" in all His messages was the one thing indispensable to securing His favour in the former dispensation. And to hearken to the messages of life and salvation sent to men over the blood of His Son, is the one condition of enjoying all the blessings set forth under the new and better covenant.

IV. It is dangerous to turn a deaf ear to God's messages (Prov. xxix. 1). When Pharaoh would not listen to God's messages though warned by one plague after another, he was at last visited by the death of his first born; and when after a pause, he would not listen even to that, he was drowned and all his host in the waters of the Red Sea! When the Israelites in their wanderings would not believe in God's course of leading them, but complained of every new trial they met with, He at last condemned them to wander in the desert for life, so that they never reached the promised rest (Ps. xcv. 10, 11). When Eli did not set forth with sufficient reprobation the evil conduct of his sons in the priests' office, but allowed them to remain in the priesthood, notwithstanding their grievous sins, God punished both father and sons, by the terrible death which befell the latter in one day (1 Sam. ii. 26–34, and iv. 17). When Saul disobeyed repeatedly the commandment of the Lord by-and-bye "the Spirit of the Lord departed from him, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him" (1 Sam. xvi. 14). This ended in his going to a sorceress for comfort, and finally finding a tragic death in the battle-field (chap. xxxi.). The curse of barrenness in Ahab's days came because of the wide-spread idolatries in the land, and the refusal of both king and people to hear the Divine messages sent to them (1 Kings xviii. 18). For a like reason destruction came on Ahab's house (chap. xxi. 20–23). (See also 2 Chron. xxv. 16; xxxiii. 10, 11), and on the kingdom of Israel first, and then of Judah, for their long-continued idolatries (2 Kings xvii. 5–18; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15–17; Jer. xxv. 3–11). Destruction of Jerusalem (Luke xix. 41–44).

V. Messages of good to the righteous, and of evil to the wicked often come together. The message of a son at last to be born to Abraham, and so the first step taken to fulfil the great promises made to him, came the same day and by the same hands as the message that the hour of Sodom's doom was at last come (Gen. xviii. 10, with verses 20-23). Here, the message of doom to Eglon was also a message of liberty to his captives. Ehud was a death-bearer to the one, but a "Saviour" to the other. The death of the first-born meant deliverance to the bond-men, see also Isa. x. 5-19, with verses 20, 21.

The condemnation of unbelievers always goes with the message of pardon and eternal life to those who believe. The future lot of the righteous and that

of the wicked are also set side by side in parallel columns on the page of Scripture, Isa. iii. 10, 11; Matt. xiii. 41, 42, with 43; xxv. 34, with 41, also 46. Here v. 20 with 28. See Ps. xxxvii. 18, 19 with 20; 9, 10 with 11; 34–36 with 37.

VI. God sends messages of mercy before He sends messages of judgment. He would prevent the necessity of sending the latter by sending the former first. When Moses gave the final messages of his God to the people, he narrates first the blessings which shall come on the people, if they should obey, and afterwards denounces the curses which shall come on them on their disobedience, (Deut. xxviii. 1–14, with verses 15–68; comp. Lev. xxvi. 3–13, with verses 14–39). In the Gospel dispensation, God uniformly sends messages of peace and reconciliation to all classes of sinners in the first instance, calling on them to repent and believe, and assuring them that if they do so, the thunder cloud will pass away—but adding that if they refuse "the wrath of God shall abide upon them." The present is "the day of merciful visitation" to every man; but at death comes the message of judgment to all the impenitent (Acts xvii. 30, 31; Rev. xxi. 6, 7, with 8; and N. T. *passim*).

VII. It is our duty and our wisdom to be always ready to receive the Lord's messages. Most men are *not* ready when the message comes, Luke xvii. 27–30; xii. 20; xvi., 19, with 23. Matt. xxv. 5; 1 Thes. v. 3; 1 Kings, xxii. 26, 27, with 34–37; Prov. xiv. 32; Matt. vii. 13; 2 Sam. xviii. 9.

Some *are* ready, Luke ii. 29, 30; 2 Tim. iv. 6–8; Acts vii. 59, 60; Heb. xi. 13–16; 2 Cor. v. 2, 9; 2 Sam. xv. 26; Ch. xxiii. 5; 1 Sam. iii. 18.

Hard Tests of Loyalty.

I. Fidelity to God's cause costs much. If a man would be faithful to God in standing up for the cause of righteousness in a world of sin, he must be ready to sacrifice flesh and blood. Christ lays it down as a rule, that we must "bear a cross," if we would follow after him. He even goes the length of saying—"*If a man come to me, and hate not father and mother, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple*" These judges had, each of them to take his life in his hand, in proving his fidelity to his God. Most of them were at the head of armies in the field, yet these armies were small in comparison with the force of the enemy; and all hope of victory according to mere natural calculation was taken away. But Ehud's case was one that required a greater sacrifice still. He had to do the work of an army all alone; and in this respect bore some analogy to the case of Samson. The work assigned him was to emancipate the church by putting to death the persecutor. The duty was a stern one. It was most revolting in itself—a savage and cruel act, having all the appearance of murder—the murder too of a king, without the least warning, in the midst of his guards and the entire responsibility rested on him alone. But the victim was the oppressor of God's church, and Ehud's eye must not spare. The question was how far would he go in loyalty to God's command, and for the good of God's church. Would he go through the most disagreeable, revolting and dangerous duty without flinching, when it became a question of duty to his God?

II. Examples from Scripture.

(1.) **The case of the Levites.** When Moses called on them to go from gate to gate of the camp, and slay every man, his brother, his companion, his neighbour, and even his children, who had been guilty of the capital crime of idolatry. The test was stern; but they stood it, and in proof of their loyalty to their God no less than 3000

perished in this way. A greater sacrifice of their feelings they could not make. Hence they are honoured ever afterwards, and rewarded with the Divine blessing, Deut. xxxiii. 9, with Ex. xxxii. 26–28.

(2.) **The case of Abraham and his son.** Gen. xxii. 1-3, 10.

(3.) **The case of Aaron making no mourning for his sons.** Lev. x. 1-7.

(4.) **The case of Phineas.** Num. xxv. 6–13.

(5.) **The case of Abraham** yielding up the richest soil to Lot, rather than have any quarrel; for the Canaanite was still in the land, and strife was a reproach to religion. Gen. xiii. 9.

(6.) **The case of those who acquiesce in the destruction of all that are disloyal to the Saviour.** 1 Cor. xvi. 22; Rev. xix. 3; Luke xvi. 24–26; 27–29; 30, 31.

III. General examples.

(1.) **At a critical moment in the battle of Waterloo,** when everything depended on the steadiness of the soldiery, the iron Duke himself rode up to one of the bravest regiments in the British army, to encourage them in the perilous position which they occupied. It was in the heat of the fight, when the bullets were flying thick as hail. Many had fallen, and many were falling. The men were most anxious to be allowed to meet the enemy with the bayonet. And when they saw their commander so near, the cry went up, "Let us at 'em, my lord! let us at 'em!" "Not yet, my brave men" was the reply; "but you shall have at 'em soon! Stand firm—stand firm!" "Enough my lord!" was the rejoinder, "We stand here till the last man falls!" Severe was the test of loyalty, and nobly did these heroes stand the test.

(2.) **Memento of fidelity.** That fatal day on which Vesuvius, at whose feet Pompeii stood, burst out into an eruption that shook the earth, a sentinel kept watch by the gate which looked to the burning mountain, and amidst the fearful disorder the sentinel had been forgotten; as it was the stern rule, that happen what might, the sentinels must hold their posts till relieved, he had to choose between death and dishonour. He resolved to stand by his post. Slowly but surely the ashes rise on his manly form; now they reach his breast; and now, covering his lips they choke his breathing. He was faithful to his soldier's duty unto death. After nearly eighteen centuries, they found his skeleton standing erect in a marble niche, clad in its rusty armour, the helmet on his empty skull, and his bony fingers still closed upon spear.

(3.) **An incident of the Seikh war.** (1846). At the celebrated battle of Ferozeshahr, when the English Empire in India hung by a thread, an incident is related by one who was present on the field, which forcibly illustrates the stedfastness and loyalty of the British troops under severely trying circumstances. The battle had been raging throughout the day. A deadly storm of lead and iron, consisting of round shot, shells, grape and musketry had been playing on the small British army throughout the day, while mines also were sprung under their feet. Not a man had tasted food, that day, nor had had a drop of water to cool his parched lips. A fearful night followed. The enemy kept firing on incessantly. The glare of the burning camp, the explosion of mines, shells, and ammunition wagons, mixed with the wild cries of the enemy, the huzzas of our men, and the groans of the wounded and dying—the trampling of men and horses, and the continual plunging of the shot among us, altogether formed a scene of terrific and awful grandeur which it is impossible to describe.

Many a gallant fellow was lying in those silent squares, bleeding to death, yet not a murmur was heard. Among other cases, a man of a cowardly spirit was struck with a grape-shot in the shoulder, receiving a flesh wound. The foolish fellow wished to get out of the square, and would not be quiet, but kept on telling everyone he was wounded, as if his wound was of more consequence than that of anybody else. Being refused by a Sergeant of his

company, he went to his Colour-Sergeant, saying, "Sir! I am badly wounded; let me go out of the square, that I may get a surgeon." The reply was, "Lie down where you are, sir!—look at me," lifting up his leg without a foot! But he was determined to gain his point, and came to a Lieutenant, who commanded his company, and was lying near me, saying, "O, sir! I wish you would give orders to let me out of the square—I am wounded." "So am I," coolly answered the Lieutenant, at the same time lifting up his left arm, which hung shattered by his side. Though he was so near me, I knew not till then that he was hurt.

The man still persisted, and went to a higher officer with the same request, who replied, "I too am wounded as well as you." Still he persevered, and came now to the Colonel commanding the regiment, who was still on horseback. He was only two yards distant from me. "Sir!" the man cried, "I am wounded." "Oh! you are wounded, are you?" said the Colonel. "And so am I!" I then perceived that he was wounded just below the knee, and the blood having filled his boot, was trickling from the heel to the ground! The Assistant Sergeant-Major was watching the man, and being annoyed at the disturbance he was causing, determined to stop it. He ran and seized him, and was about to give him a severe reprimand. But just at that instant, a large cannon-ball carried away both his head and that of the cowardly complainer at the same moment—so killing both! What a severe test to the loyalty of those noble troops!

[*An Eye-witness.*]

PERIOD OF REST.—*Verses* 30, 31.

30. The land had rest fourscore years.] This must mean the whole country, and not merely the tribes of Benjamin, Judah, and Ephraim. The fourscore years would date from the deliverance by Ehud till the oppression by Jabin. During some part of that long course, Ehud died; and it may have been a considerable time after his death that the invasion by Jabin commenced. The mention of Ehud's name in chap. iv. 1 does not mean that Ehud had just died, open sin again began, and the scourge by that northern power was sent—*all simultaneously.* But the case stood thus: Ehud, while he lived, was a check on the open exhibition of idolatry, which all the time had been more or less secretly cherished in the hearts of most of the people. On his death, the obstruction being removed, the tide again began to flow, and gradually reached high-water mark. *But then there was no Ehud to roll it back.* Therefore the Divine judgments again fell on the land. This may have been a considerable time after Ehud was dead.

It is instructive to notice, what a beneficent influence for good a single righteous man at the helm of power, may exercise in giving a tone to the character of his people and his age. If he is but faithful to his trust, and skilful at the helm, he may, under the Divine blessing, steer the vessel safely through all the mountain waves that threaten to engulph her, and in due time bring her into a smooth sea, with canvas spread to a favouring breeze, giving promise of a prosperous voyage and a rich harvest of results to all concerned. On this topic we do not now dwell, as it will come under review again. But meanwhile it speaks much for Ehud, that he was *so much missed after he was gone.* This is one of the best testimonies a man can have—that when he is gone things go wrong, and it is hard to get one to fill his place.

SHAMGAR.

After him was Shamgar, the son of Anath.] Not after his example [*Cassel*], meaning, in like manner as Ehud did so did Shamgar. Nor yet does it imply, that after Ehud was dead, Shamgar came as his successor. But the next deliverance in the series was that wrought through the instrumentality of Shamgar. Some suppose that this exploit of Ehud took place during Ehud's time, at some part of the period of the eighty years. [*Jewish Expositors* generally, *Cassel*, etc.] This is most unlikely, both because Ehud while alive acted as the protector of the land, and also because the times of Shamgar were times of great oppression (chap. v. 6), which was not true of Ehud's time. It is indeed all but certain that Ehud was dead, and that another time of oppression had come on the land, when there was no Ehud to stand in the gap. The people were again going on sinning, and God was again beginning to smite them with the rod—Jabin in the north, and the Philistines in the south. Anath, some suppose to be the same with Anathoth, which was a sacerdotal city of the tribe of Benjamin, a few miles to the north of Jerusalem, and the birthplace afterwards of the prophet Jeremiah.

Slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad.] The *Septuagint* uses the word ἀροτροπούς, or the plough handle—that part which the ploughman holds in his hand, and with which he guides the plough. But the *Targum* version seems more correct, viz., the "prick" against which the oxen "kicked" when struck with it—the ox-goad proper. *Jamieson* says "this implement was eight feet long, and about six inches in circumference. It is armed at the lesser end with a sharp prong for driving the cattle, and on the other with a small iron paddle for removing the clay which encumbers the plough in working. Such an instrument, wielded by a strong arm, would do no mean execution. He may, however, have been only the leader of a band of peasants, who, by means of such implements of labour (and in particular the ox-goads), as they could lay hold of at the moment, achieved this heroic exploit."

The Greeks called it βουπλῆξ. With such an instrument, king Lycurgus is said to have attacked the wandering Bacchus and his followers. In like manner Camillus and Curius went from the plough to save Rome from the Gauls. A tradition in Holstein says, that in the Swedish time a peasant armed with a pole put to flight a multitude of Swedes, who had entered his house and threatened to burn it.

He also delivered Israel.] There is something peculiar in the *manner* in which these victories of the judges are gained. It is not in the exact proportion in which the spirit of heroism is possessed. There is a deeper element than bravery, or skill, or physical force. There is the element of piety. The victors were more than patriots. They were men of faith. While ardently devoted to their country, they saw in their land a sacred possession given them by their God as a pledge of His covenant love; and they saw in their people the church of the living God, among whom He had planted His institutions and His laws. Faith in the promises He had given His Church and people lay at the root of all their action, both as regards the object they had in view, and the confidence of victory which they cherished. "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge."

It is for this *reason that Shamgar's act receives an honourable mention in this Book.* It was an act of deliverance wrought for the Church of God in an evil time; it was done on the spot where his lot was cast; it was done of his own free will when no others appeared ready to repair the breach; it was done against the greatest odds; and, above all, it was done in *faith*—that sacred

feature of character by which "all the elders obtained a good report." On this account a single verse is added to notice this noble act of a man of true faith; and through this single verse his name "will be held in everlasting remembrance." More imperishable is the monument thus raised to an otherwise humble man, than to those mighty Egyptian monarchs who have the Pyramids for their memorial. God has always a few names, in a backsliding age, of those who are loyal to His cause, to show that His Spirit has not left His Church on earth. And now there was at least one man of the Joshua and Caleb spirit still in the land. Though only one man comes to the front, there may have been, as in Elijah's day, other 7000 hidden behind the curtain, who did not bow the knee to Baal.

Was Shamgar entitled to the honourable distinction of being a Judge over the people of God? Many answer in the negative, because it is not said, "the Lord raised him up," nor that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him;" nor is he said to have ruled, but only to have gained a victory with small means. He is also passed over in Chap. iv. 1. Yet his name stands in the same honourable roll, ("After Ehud rose Shamgar," etc.) Few could doubt on reflection, that it was the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him that led him to do as he did The value of his act affected the whole land, for it was not merely the slaughter of a few hundred men in some isolated foray; it seems rather to have been the nipping of an invasion in the bud—arresting a calamity at its outset, which but for this timely extinction might have overspread the whole country. There can be little doubt, that if Shamgar had not stood forward to the rescue, this incursion of the Philistines would have rapidly overshadowed the nation.

Besides, it is expressly stated, that he "delivered Israel" like the other Judges. The office of a "*judge*" in that age was not to administer justice in the ordinary way. It was rather to act the part of a "*saviour*," (so it is expressly termed in Neh. ix. 27)—one who accomplishes a *deliverance* on the foundation of *righteousness*. He was to lead the people to penitence, not only to sorrow for the past, but to reformation for the future. His duty was to see that the law of God be kept by the people as the only secure foundation for a lasting peace. On this footing, all the "judges" were types of *the Saviour*, whose great work in this world was to work out an eternal redemption on the ground of perfect righteousness—to make "*grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life*," etc. It is easy for God to work deliverance for any people when His law is kept. When that is not done, He cannot deliver, because He cannot offer a slight to His own character.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SAD HISTORY OF SIN CONTINUED.—Verses 1-11.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. And the children of Israel again did evil, etc.] They "*continued to do evil.*" After all the solemn and affecting dealing God had had with them, no practical lessons were learned. They are as stubborn as ever in resisting Jehovah and going after idols. There is a causal connection supposed between the death of Ehud and the renewed rebellion of the people against their God. When the hand that held it back is removed, the needle of the heart turns to the old pole of idol-worship. This implies that Ehud, while he lived, was a power in the land, and had long been successful in stemming the torrent of evil, If so, this is very unlike the character of a man who could commit an atrocious murder, as so many commentators suppose he did on Eglon. Shamgar is not mentioned, because his date was subsequent to this. Also, he did not deliver from a long subjugation of the land by an enemy, when the people had

been for a series of years in bondage. Rather, his work was to turn back the first wave of oppression, and prevent it happening at all. Though a new generation had sprung up, the identity of the people as a whole is still assumed; and so it ever is.

2. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, etc.] He gave them up helplessly into his power, leaving him to do with them as if they were his own property (see Notes on chap. iii. 8). Considerably more than a century and a half before this period, we hear of another Jabin, king of Hazor, whom Joshua defeated, destroyed all his people, and burnt his city with fire (see Josh. xi. 1, 8–11). But the name Jabin was probably the hereditary and official title of the kings of Hazor. It means "the discerning," or "the wise—the intelligent" (*Speaker's Com.*). "Hazor" means *fort*, or *castle*. The Hebrew word means anything enclosed; but in the kindred Semitic languages, the root means to *wall round—to besiege*. It was a common name. In our own language, the name *Chester* is similarly common, as in Glou*cester*, Lei*cester*, Ciren*cester*, etc. Its position seems to have been near the Lake Merom, and was within the territory assigned to the tribe of Napthali, though there is great difference of opinion as to its precise site. It was a strong fortress both by nature and art, and standing as it did on a hill surrounded by a plain, it was specially suitable as a stronghold for a people whose main reliance was upon horses and chariots. Hazor had now been rebuilt, and become again the head of the northern Canaanitish nations. The other cities had also long recovered their old strength. But Hazor was the chief city in northern Palestine. Jabin appears to have been hoping that some happy accident would one day put it in his power to win back the territories of which his predecessors had been dispossessed by Joshua. Sisera ("meditation") was his commander-in-chief—a name long a great terror to Israel (1 Sam. xii. 9; Ps. lxxxiii. 9).*

"Harosheth of the nations" (Josh. xii. 23). This word *nations* has been taken to mean a collection of peoples of various nationalities fused into one state, as the kingdom of Mercia was in early English history. "Harosheth" signifies *arsenal* or *workmanship*—cutting and carving, whether in stone or wood (Exod. xxxi. 5), and so might be applied to the place where such works are carried on. The conjecture is, that this being a great timber district, rich in cedars and fir trees, and near Great Zidon (Josh. xi. 8), Jabin kept a large number of oppressed Israelites at work in hewing and preparing it at Harosheth for transport to Zidon; and that these wood cutters, armed with axes and hatchets, formed the soldiers of Barak's army.

3. Cried unto the Lord, etc.] (See Notes on chap. iii. 9), comp. Josh. xvii. 16. The chariots of iron were a very formidable arm of fighting in those days. Mightily] or with crushing force (1 Sam, ii. 16). The same as tyrannically. The word חָזַק is the same with that used in Ex. iii. 9, meaning *oppressed cruelly*. Their task work in hewing timber was like that of their ancestors in making bricks.

4. Deborah, a prophetess, judged Israel, etc.] Deborah, a prophetic woman. She was a prophetess, like Miriam (Ex. xv. 20), Huldah (2 Kings xxii. 14). This character which she had was the reason for her taking the lead in this emergency. The prophetic state was more than a Divine ecstasy, a high poetic enthusiasm under the influence of which the praises of God are spoken (*Cassel*). It was a being made the organ of communicating the Divine will to men—a spokesman for God. She was commissioned to act both as judge and as prophetess. The name Deborah signifies *"a bee;"* and she is described as a burning woman—"the wife or a woman of Lapidoth," *torches*—a woman of a torch-like spirit. She was a person of fire-bearing character and intense enthusiasm. Some say she was the wife of Barak, which signifies *lightning*. [*Edersheim.*] "She was a honey bee to her friends, but a stinging bee to her enemies." [*Fausset.*]

5. She dwelt under the palm-tree of Deborah, etc.] She *sat* in judgment (Ps. ix. 4) under the *Deborah* palm—so called because Rebekah's nurse was here buried (Gen. xxxv. 8) in Mount Ephraim, between Ramah and Bethel. Ramah was built on a round hill, five miles east of Gibeon; and a little to the north of it, in the deep hot valley between Ramah and Bethel, was the palm-tree of Deborah. The ordinary place for giving judgment was the gate (Ruth iv. 1, 2), but this retired spot was suitable to the unsettled times.

6. Barak, the son of Abinoam, of Kedesh-Naphtali.] Barak signifies *lightning*, an appropriate name for a warrior; and there was more in names in those days than there is now. Some call him the Boanerges of the Old Testament; but that is too much, for it required not a little rousing to bring him up to the high mark of the character known by that name. *Kedesh* was a Levitical city of refuge assigned to the Gershon division. It stood on a high ridge jutting out from the hills, at the western edge of Lake Huleh, the marshy basin through which the Jordan passes into the sea of Merom. It was in Naphtali (Josh. xix. 37). The Lord God of Israel.] The name of the God who made a covenant with Abraham and his seed, and who brought up Israel with high hand out of Egypt. Go and draw toward Mount Tabor, etc.] Draw מָשַׁךְ. This is rendered very differently by commentators. Some—*Approach to*. But the preposition

* The name Sisera occurs among the Nethinim, or servants of the temple, who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel (Ezra ii. 53); also in Neh. vii. 54, 55, it is associated with the name Harsha, as if connected with Harosheth.

is *in* or *upon*. Others—*Draw out or prolong*. As sound of trumpet would do, when the people were summoned to come forward to Mount Tabor, just as the people were required to meet Ehud at Mount Ephraim. Others make it—draw out, or *extend* the military force to be employed. Others regard it as a command to enlist or *draft all the willing* among the people, or persuade the people by attractive methods. *Keil* renders it—proceed one after another in a long-drawn train (chap. xx. 37; Ex. xii. 21)—referring to the captain, and the warriors drawing after him. This is near it. But *Lias* expresses it better—"*Draw out upon Mount Tabor.*" We understand that Mount Tabor was the point of *rendezvous* toward which Barak was to lead his troops gradually, until Jehovah had led Sisera with his host to the brook Kishon. Yet more precisely the meaning seems to be—draw in small detachments, one after another, men willing to fight for their country, until 10,000 are assembled, as rapidly as can be done, when all Israel is scattered, and as secretly as can be done, that Sisera may not prevent their assembling. Draw to Tabor, not to Kedesh, for that town is too near Hazor, and besides the mountain named is a better centre for a rendezvous, being considerably farther south. Mount Tabor]—now called *Jebel et Tur*—rises on the east from the plain of Esdraelon, where Sisera's chariots would be assembled, and was a convenient rallying point for all in Napthali and Zebulon on the north, and for Issachar and Manasseh on the south. It stands by itself on the plain, a truncated cone of limestone, with flat top, an area of a quarter of a mile in length, and half that in breadth. Round the circumference are the ruins of a thick wall of masonry, and there are the foundations of private dwellings within. The height is estimated from 1000 to 3000 feet, and it requires an hour to ascend it. The sides to the very top are covered with verdure and clumps of trees, oaks, olives, and sycamores, with many plants and flowers. It overtops all the neighbouring hills (Jer. xlvi. 18), and commands a magnificent view of Northern Palestine, especially to the west. It *may* have been the Mount of Transfiguration, as the reasoning to the contrary consists quite as much of strong assertion as of clear evidence.

7. And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon, Sisera, etc.] Speaking in the Spirit she says, I will draw—meaning God will draw Sisera to Kishon. This word signifies *bent like a bow*, and is so called from its winding course. It was a sort of *winter torrent* [*Lias*] like Kedron (John xviii. 1). It is perennial for eight miles, fed from sources along the whole plain of Jezreel. It takes its rise near Mounts Tabor and Gilboa. Though dry in summer, a rushing stream pours down in it in winter. In the valley on both sides of this river, or brook, called the plain of Jezreel, the greatest battles have been fought for the possession of Palestine, from time immemorial down to recent times. Thither God was now drawing Sisera and his host as "the sheaves into the floor, that the daughter of Zion might arise and thresh" (Micah iv. 12, 13). This was typical of the drawing of the forces of Antichrist to their place of doom (Rev. xvi. 14, 16; xix. 19, 20). God draws His people to their salvation (verse 6; John vi. 44) and the ungodly to their destruction (1 Kings xxii. 19-23).

8. If thou wilt go with me then I will go, etc.] These words spoken to a woman are not very like a Boanerges. Barak's faith was manifestly weak, like Gideon (vi. 15, 36), and Moses (Ex. iv. 10, 13), and Peter (Matt. xiv. 30, 31), showing that the best of men are but men at the best. God's command and promise ought to have been enough (verses 6, 7). Yet God has not left His name out of the list of faith, any more than that of Samson (Heb. xi. 32-34). To show that God has regard to faith, even when it is only like a grain of mustard seed. Yet we must not underrate Barak. He did not look on Deborah so much as a *woman*, as on *one who had the Spirit of God*. And this, be it man or woman, meant an all-conquering strength. It did however look a little like the superstitious feeling of the Israelites, when they thought themselves safer by taking the ark into the field, than by simply trusting in the promise of help assured by their God on their obedience (1 Sam. iv. 3-5). Some class Barak as an illustration of the phrase, "out of weakness made strong" (Heb. xi. 34). He needed some visible presence to strengthen his faith in the invisible power. We too often need something of sight to help our weak faith—the touch of our Father's hand in the dark, to show that He is with us. But God had compassion on his imperfect faith, and accepted him, seeing "the root of the matter was in him." Ten thousand men, and these undisciplined, was after all but a feeble wand to be used against a mighty host like that commanded by Sisera. It was like "the worm Jacob employed to thresh the mountains." But all the battles of God's cause are battles of faith—not however to the exclusion of the use of rational means, within the limits prescribed by God's Providence. *Trapp* says, the soldiers' motto should be, *Neque timidè, neque temerè.*

9. Into the hand of a woman.] This was Jael, though Barak might suppose it was Deborah herself. The honour was certainly denied to Barak. Deborah appears to have been a remarkable character, full of the true fire of enthusiasm, and just the very person to stir the embers of a dying faith among the people. It is wonderful sometimes how a whole nation will instinctively follow a single bold flashing spirit, with resolute purpose, and mind fully made up, pursuing what seems to it the Divine path of duty. Her influence arose not from her social status, though that was considerable, if we are to believe the Chaldee paraphrast, who tells us that she possessed palm-trees in Jericho, parks (or paradises) in Ramah, and productive olives in the valley, a house of irrigation in Bethel and white dust in the king's mount. But her peerless distinction was that

the Spirit of the Lord spake by her. The people believed that she was the organ of Divine communications. Hence her power to lift the whole nation from a state of languid despondency to the elevation of the assurance of hope, by the nature of the communications which she made A bright face, kindled up with intelligence, from which doubt has fled, where resolution, zeal, and ardour reign, where the spirit triumphs over the flesh, and where man seems transformed into an angel of the Lord, could not fail to inspire men as with life from the dead. And so from the moment that Deborah announces the Divine purpose to emancipate the people, and Barak accepts of the office of leader, all things flow naturally and rapidly on to success.

10. Barak called Zebulon and Naphtali to Kedesh.] These were the tribes that chiefly furnished the supplies of troops (verse 6), though not exclusively. Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh, and Issachar sent valuable help (chap. v. 14, 15). And some other tribes are spoken of reprovingly, if not upbraidingly, because they failed to show their practical sympathy (chap. v. 16, 17). For this oppression affected the whole land, and that most grievously, though the northern parts in a greater degree. To Kedesh the prophetess accompanies Barak. Notwithstanding the distance in the extreme north, and the dangers of travelling in such times, she hesitates not for a moment. When God's work has to be done, all other considerations must give way. She herself acts on the firm belief of her own words, and wherever she goes she becomes a revival power. The leaders of the people, or heads of households, assemble to Barak in his home at Kedesh. Not the whole people. But those leaders would receive their instructions from Deborah and Barak together, and then return to their respective circles to collect their people. Fired with the idea that the hour of deliverance was come, the men of Israel collect, descending on all sides from their mountains like the Swiss against the Austrians, and proceed to Mount Tabor, Barak going before, and ten thousand following *in his train;* or as some render it *on foot*, implying that they were all infantry, and neither chariots nor cavalry.

11. Now Heber the Kenite . . . . had severed himself, etc.] The interesting notices given of this family (the Kenites) arise first from their connection with Moses, and afterwards from the principal branch of them casting in their lot with the people of God. The father was "Reuel," or "Raguel" (Ex. ii. 18; Num. x. 29), the *priest* of Midian (Ex. ii. 16; also xviii. 1; some say the word means *prince*). "Jethro" was still another name which he had, as in Ex. xviii. *passim*. [Some would prefer to say that Renel was the father, and Jethro and Hobab were the two sons—in this case translating the word *chotheen* to mean brother-in-law in Ex. xviii., for in such a case Jethro would be the brother of Zipporah, and therefore brother-in-law to Moses. But we prefer to regard all the three names, Reuel, Raguel, and Jethro, as simply different names for the same person.] Hobab was his son, and therefore *brother*-in-law to Moses. Thus the word ought to be rendered here. Moses seems to have been successful in making Jethro a decided fearer of the God of Israel (see Ex. xviii. 8-11). And when he got the opportunity he used his most earnest entreaties with Hobab, his brother-in-law. Though at first unsuccessful (Num. x. 29, 30, etc.), he would appear in the end to have won him fairly over. For we find in Jud. i. 16 allusion made to the family name among the children of Israel—the children of the Kenite, who seemed at first to have settled in the city of palm trees, finding it not suitable apparently for their flocks, they went up to the wilderness, or open pasture lands of the tribe of Judah. And now here again is another change. From some cause there was a split among the descendants of Hobab, and Heber, an influential member of the circle, left the others in Judah, and found his way north as far as Kedesh. Whether it was that the Kenites were degenerating into idol-worship like the Israelites generally, among whom they dwelt, and that Heber was a fast worshipper of the God of Israel, we cannot tell for certain. But the separation was permanent. He still lived *in tents;* the desert life was not forgotten, and the spot he chose for his rest was the oak forest of Zaanannim, near Kedesh.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 1-11.

FRESH PROVOCATION; RENEWED BONDAGE; RESORT ANEW TO PRAYER; DELIVERANCE AGAIN PROVIDED.

It ought never to be forgotten by the thoughtful readers of this Book that one leading purpose in view is to put the human heart fairly to the test. Under the most favourable circumstances, it is left to itself to decide whether, without any driving or special pressure of any kind, it would be disposed of itself to choose the service of the only living and true God, and keep vows of fidelity to Him which it had solemnly made. There is no Joshua nor Moses now alive to guide this people. They are left purposely without any man in the position of having to decide for them. Their decision must be entirely their own, and it must

be made in such a way as to be a fair index of the state of their hearts. The experiment goes on throughout the whole Book, and though it is continued for upwards of 400 years, it is one long continued series of failures to keep their allegiance to their God. At the close, it might be written down, *fully tried and found wanting.* This Book of Judges is of far higher use than ordinary histories. It is a *sacred* history—the history of men as before God, and under very special moral and spiritual dealing. It is the history of the Church of God, or of the cause of God in the world, so that sins committed have a deeper aggravation, afflictions sent have a deeper and more significant meaning, and deliverances accomplished have a more sacred character. But first of all, the object is to bring out men's characters before God, and that we should specially keep in view as we proceed to gather up the instruction of chapter iv.

I. Fresh provocation. "*They did (the) evil again in the sight of the Lord,*" etc. This comes in like a melancholy dirge from the tombs, indicating the hopeless condition of those who are "dead in trespasses and sins." We hear it as a moan from captives that are helplessly bound. "Ichabod" is indelibly marked both at the top and bottom of the page, and all through. "The plague of the heart" continues. "*The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint,*" etc. The leprosy is in the blood. (See on chap. iii. 7, 12.) "*When Ehud was dead,*" rather, *and* Ehud was dead. Not that their apostasy broke out immediately after he had died; but when it did break out, there was no Ehud to stem the torrent.

How *brief* is the notice given of the people's sin! A single line suffices for that—two verses tell the story of their suffering which lasted for twenty years, and with the weight of a tyrant's rod all the time. But the whole chapter, or twenty-one verses are occupied with the account of the Divine deliverance. Why is this? Is it (1) Because *man's work is so bad that it will not bear to be repeated,* or dwelt upon, and the sooner it is forgotten the better, or is it (2) Because *God in mercy to His people would say as little about their backslidings as possible.* Faithfully He points out that there is something decidedly wrong, but He has no pleasure in dwelling upon it. His "charity thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity." The statement is made to justify Him in sending His judgments, not to gratify any possible delight He could take in spreading out their sins before His face. Or is it (3) Because *the simple fact that they had cast off their God,* without any amplification of details, was quite enough to kindle the Divine anger, and lead to deplorable results—whatever the reason may be, the fact is patent throughout this book, that the sins of the people are told in a line or two, while the story of God's mercy in delivering them from the consequences of their sins goes down all over the page.

Their sinning against God afresh after so much chastisement shows:—

1. **The ineradicable nature of sin.** No number of stripes seems to have any effect in curing this terrible evil. Though it has been burned into them that "the way of transgressors is hard," so soon as they are left to themselves they again begin to transgress. Sin is like some of those strong chemical liquids, of which when a drop falls on the cloth, it is impossible with ever so much washing to take out the stain. "*Though thou wash thee with nitre and take thee much soap, yet is thine iniquity marked before Me, saith the Lord God.* This people had unmistakable evidence of the fearful calamities that must accompany or come in the track of sin. Two black clouds had already darkened their sky, the bursting of which it might have been supposed would never have been forgotten. Either of these tempests, but for the interposition of the Divine mercy, out of ordinary course, might have blotted them out of existence as a nation, or reduced them to the level of a second Egyptian bondage. They were placed entirely at the mercy of those whose tenderest mercies are cruel. They

had experience of the cold, hard fact, that "the worst enemy of man is man." And yet we find them here running down the hill to ruin as before. There is no change in the stubborn tendency to go astray from God. Though they have already tumbled twice over the precipice and been dashed among the rocks, through their obstinately taking the wrong course, being saved only by the outstretching of the gracious hand of their God, they yet, after all, now rush on blindfolded in the old track. Well might the prophet of many tears exclaim, "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots,*" etc.

2. The special force of evil in an easily-besetting sin. Idolatry was, for the Israelite, an easily-besetting sin, mainly for two reasons: (1) Because of the strong native tendency of the human heart to go away from God, and give its love and allegiance to other objects, which also must, in some sense, be gods; for the human heart cannot want a god of some kind; and (2) Because the stream of custom over the whole world was always flowing in that direction. It was a kind of spiritual aneurism in the system, an evil tumour which draws into it the arterial blood, we might say, the very life-blood, defying all art or skill of man to effect a cure. It seems as if the whole strength of corruption in a man's nature were gathered up in his easily besetting sin, so that to do battle with it is to assail the very fortress of depravity and not merely an outpost. The whole garrison of evil in the heart fights at this point. The word used in the original is very forcible (Heb. xii. 1)—εὐπερίστατον—the sin which *well surrounds us—i.e., easily*, or *strongly* surrounds, which besets or encircles us like the folds of a serpent, a veritable boa-constrictor, that which encircles and holds us fast, which keeps us as prisoners. All sin does so, more or less, but none grasps so tight as that to which we are peculiarly prone or liable, whether constitutionally, from long indulgence, or strong temptations. Victory over an easily besetting sin means victory over the whole strength of evil in the heart.

3. A specific for the cure of sin must be something out of ordinary course. Nothing within the limits of ordinary motives will effectually turn a man aside from his idols, and permanently stem all the outflow of evil from the bitter spring. The strength of the passion, or evil tendency of the nature, always overmasters the force of reason. "*I see the good; I follow the evil,*" is the candid confession even of the heathen heart. While the Christian, conscious far more clearly of the strength of evil within him, cries out, "*O, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?*" etc. The headstrong tendency of sin in the heart has all the force of an ungovernable passion, or of a blind infatuation. Happy is the man who is candid enough to admit the cancerous nature of his heart malady, and who with that conviction applies in good earnest to the One Physician who is able to effect a cure. "Create in me a clean heart" is the only prayer that will do; and Psalm li. throughout is the best prescription to meet the case.

The whole history of ancient Israel, especially as recorded in this Book of Judges, is a luminous commentary on the truth and force of the paragraph in Rom. vii. 14–25. The law of God presents duty clearly; men's hearts and consciences assent to its excellence, but, notwithstanding of this, the evil principles in the heart remain in full force, and there is still a persistence in going astray from God. The mere strength of reason for the performance of a certain duty, or the avoidance of a certain sin, will not take away the disobedient spirit of the unrenewed heart. "The law in my members—in my flesh, the unsanctified nature—brings me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members," *i.e.* to itself. That law of sin is always in operation, and can only be counteracted and fairly overcome by the fixed and permanent operation in the soul of another law—"the law of the spirit of life by Christ Jesus." [*See*

Hodge on Rom. vii. *throughout.*] One thing is abundantly proved by every page of this book—that the authoritative declaration that a thing must not be done, does not destroy the inclination to do it. It follows that if sin is to be effectually cured in the heart and life, a man must be "created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works." (See Ezek. xxxvi. 25–27; Eph. iv. 23; 2 Cor. v. 17.) [See other remarks on chap. iii. 7 and 12.]

II. Bondage renewed (verses 2, 3).—"*The Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin*, etc.—*twenty years he mightily oppressed them.*"

1. The calamity did not come unsent. It was not "a chance that happened to them." They first sold themselves to do wickedly before the Lord, and in due time He sold them into the hands of the spoiler. Their long season of prosperity instead of confirming them in their attachment to their own God, only led them to forget Him and to walk after their own wicked ways, from which they had never been really weaned. "The prosperity of fools destroyeth them." *Henry* remarks, "they alienated themselves from God, as if they were none of His; and then God on His part alienated them as none of His. They that throw themselves out of God's service, throw themselves out of God's protection. *What has my beloved to do in my house*, when she has thus played the harlot?"

Men are slow to regard their afflictions in life—their disappointments, their hard lot, their bitter experiences, and their dark skies, as having anything to do with the ungodly life they lead—their practical forgetfulness of God, and setting aside His law as the rule of life. It seems not to occur to them that the God before whom they lead their life, is greatly offended with this neglect of His claims and despising of His commandments, as if a creature would dare to assert that it was not His property, and owed Him no allegiance and even no attention. For this practical forgetting of God, and neglect of their duties to Him, He sends one arrow of adversity after another to awaken their attention to His voice. But they are slow to understand. They "hear not the rod" neither do they know Him who appointed it. (Jer. viii. 7). God said of His ancient people "they are sottish children (*thick headed*) and they have no understanding." Even when God dealt in great mercy with them, "taking them by the arms, they knew not that He healed them." Christ says of foolish Jerusalem, "thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

No affliction comes unsent. There is indeed no audible voice telling in articulate tones, why this and the other bitter dispensation of God's providence is appointed. Also, some time generally elapses between the commission of sin and the sorrow which comes after it, just as some time elapses between the moment when we see a gun fired at a considerable distance from us, before we hear the report of the firing. God is not quick to use the rod, for He takes no pleasure in the work of inflicting punishment. This men mistake to mean, that there is no causal connection between their sin and their misery. Yet not more certain is the law by which a man reaps of the same kind that he sows, than is the arrangement by which misery in some form will either accompany or flow from sin. It is fundamental to say "The wages of sin is death." God, however, does not tell it with articulate voice. Everything in His dealings with us must go by faith. Hence He acts. Just as Jesus did not answer John's question directly, but bade His disciples go and tell him what things they had seen Him *do*, so God acts in a certain way in His providence, and bids us look on and consider—"Whoso is wise and observeth these things, he shall understand"—the meaning and purport of God's providence in dealing with sinners and sin.

2. Sin brings sorrow. The character of God as Moral Governor of the world requires this: To sin He is irreconcilably opposed; and towards those who

commit it, His frown must, in the events of His Providence, be sooner or later manifested. Well is it for a man who has been leading an ungodly life, if God should show His frown *now*, while yet his course of sin may be arrested, and his guilt taken away, ere it be too late. For there is such a thing as being allowed to sleep in sin till the hour for repentance has passed, and there is no possibility of escaping the terrible condemnation of the finally impenitent. Sorrows sent now, though severe and even rigorous in character, may, if improved as warning bells, lead us to lay hold of the great refuge from eternal sorrows (1 Cor. xi. 32).

These Israelites found that the "pleasures of sin" soon turned to gall and wormwood. "What better were they," says *Bp. Hall*, "to have killed Eglon, king of Moab, if the idolatry of Moab was now killing them? The sin of Moab was a worse tyrant than Eglon. Israel is for every market. They sold themselves to idolatry; God sells them to the Canaanites. It is no marvel they become slaves, if they will be idolaters. After their longest peace they have now their sorest bondage. The longer the reckoning is deferred, the greater is the amount."

3. The Divine mercy is seen in severely chastising but not destroying. God might have said: "Thy bruise is incurable, thy wound is very grievous. I will, therefore, give thee as fuel for the burning, and raise up to myself another people, true to Me in heart, and that will better show forth my praise." He had already twice delivered them from the terrible consequences of their apostasies, and said, "*Behold thou art made whole. Go, and sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee.*" And now their sin was greatly more aggravated than before. "The waters which were at first to the ankles, were now to the loins." And there seemed to be no appearance of any abatement. Might we not expect that the voice would come forth from "the Judge of all the earth" saying, I will utterly destroy, and make a full end of a people so incorrigible and rebellious? Men are disposed to act thus in similar circumstances. They are impatient, and would cut the knot, when they cannot easily untie it. They will not stand parleying long with perverse natures, but tell them flatly you must comply with the terms, or be shut out from our fellowship for ever. "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" So of Shimei. "Let me, I pray thee, smite thine enemy with the spear to the earth at once, ad I will not smite him the second time." So of king Saul. "When Herod saw that he was mocked of the wise men, he was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem." Thus it ever is with the wrath of men when excited; it goes forth to an extreme result (2 Sam. iii. 9; 1 Sam. xxv. 22; Jer. xl. 15, etc., etc.)

But when God is provoked to anger by the sins of His people, how different His tone! "I will *correct;* but I will not destroy. I will correct *in measure;*—not without limit. I will *not leave thee unpunished,* but I will not make a full end." The stripes are never given at random, but according to rule, and a careful account is kept both of their number, and their severity—not a stroke too many, and no suffering inflicted beyond what the person is able to bear. Even when God goes so far as to give His people "tears to drink in great measure like water," it is still in measure (Ps. lxxx. 5; Jer. xlvi. 28).

God was now greatly provoked with the repeated and high handed sins of His people, and for twenty long years He gave them into the hands of a relentless and revengeful enemy, who might in one fourth part of that time have destroyed Israel utterly as Israel of old time destroyed the Canaanites. But their God would not allow it, though no doubt it was in the hearts of these Canaanites to make the attempt. But their lives were made bitter with hard bondage in being set to act as hewers of wood, and do all sorts of drudgery work. They also had the sting in their hearts, that all this oppression was exercised by out-

casts and aliens, who were trampled on by their fathers, as the refuse of the earth—a people not fit to live.

The truth always comes out, that *however severely they were punished, they were never made a full end of.* He watches over them in the furnace, and allows not the fire to consume them. "When they walk through the fire they are *not burned*, neither does *the flame kindle* on them." When His own image is seen in the heated metal, instantly He abstracts it from the fire. He is jealous lest His people should receive one stroke of the rod too many (Zech. i. 14, 15), and is angry with those who would dare to go one step beyond their commission (Isa. xl. 2). (See Ps. lxxxix. 33, 34; Jer. iv. 27; v. 10, 18; xxx. 11; Amos ix. 9; Jer. xxxiii. 24–26.)

[Remarks on the *character* of God's judgment, their *severity*, the *spirit* in which they are inflicted, and the *ends* to be gained on pp. 114–119.]

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 1-3.

True Religion requires an Undivided Heart.

When a man professes solemnly and with tears that he deeply regrets having committed some error of conduct, on which those who have to do with him agree to pass over his offence and to continue friendship as before—and when after a time, during which he enjoys peace and prosperity, he again commits the same error and that more deeply than before, and even repeats this process several times of sinning and confessing, we begin to question his sincerity and to believe that his heart was not in his confession of wrong-doing, and his purpose of amendment, but that he was merely resorting to shifts to get quit of a difficulty. Thus we naturally judge of these Israelites:

"For though their words were good, their heart
With Him was not sincere;
Unstedfast and perfidious
They in His cov'nant were."

In all true religion there must be an undivided heart. "We naturally love an easy Christianity. We dislike collisions, and we fear extremes. When the world presents its claims alongside those of Christ, we are in danger of halting between two opinions. Such an attitude is full of peril. Nothing is more offensive to Christ than lukewarmness in His service.

"We must serve Christ with all our hearts, if we are to serve Him at all. No reserve or compromise, or half-heartedness, is for a moment to be allowed. Our mind must be made up. 'The eye must be single.' One master-motive — the love of Christ. One mighty aim — to glorify God in the Gospel of His Son. All other objects and aims must give way before this. Its language is 'this one thing I do!' Such were the hearts of Abraham, and Moses, and David, and Paul—of Luther and Latimer. Though they erred in some things they had this peculiarity—they had single hearts—they were men of one thing. Such a man does good by wholesale. He is like a light-house in the midst of a dark world. He reflects light on hundreds of whom he knows nothing. His Master is seen in every department of his behaviour. And he might appropriate to himself the language: 'I live, yet not *I*, but *Christ* liveth in me.' All see the bias of His character, and are obliged to confess that his religion is a real and influential thing. Without this decision a man has no true comfort in his religion; he has as much as to make him miserable, by allowing two opposite camps to have a place in his heart. But with it, he has a joy and peace, to which others never attain. His face is toward the sun, and his heart is seldom cold.

"We must not be satisfied with re-

ligious reformation without heart conversion. To lay aside open sin is nothing unless grace reigns in our hearts. The formal trappings will not do without the power of practical godliness experienced in the inner man." [*Ryle.*]

To Begin the Religious Life Easier than to Go On.

While the sun shone brightly on the faces of the vast multitude whom Joshua addressed for the last time, and all nature seemed in cheerful mood; while, too, all the Divine words of the sacred past were now changed into the living facts of the present, and they could read as matter of history that which was at first hard to believe even as Divine Prophecy—it was easy to subscribe with the hand and to say, "This God shall be our God for ever and ever!" *No cross was in sight.* No voice was heard breaking the stillness of that lovely morning, with the faithful words, "*If a man will come after Me let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*" But when a little time passes on, and the clouds gather, and the winds begin to moan, and the weather becomes foul, what a melting away of resolutions so chivalrously made! "*From that time many went back, and walked no more with Jesus.*"

It is not the beginning but the continuing of the religious profession that is the true grace. "*If ye continue in my word,*" says the Saviour, "*then are ye my disciples indeed.*" Many, under the influence of temporary excitement, enrol themselves as Christians without considering what they are doing. To begin the religious life is comparatively easy. Mixed motives aid us. The love of novelty, the praise of well-meaning professors around us, the secret self-satisfaction of feeling "how good I am," and the general excitement attending a new position. Lifted up by the wave the man begins the race, lays aside some bad habits, takes up some good ones, has many comfortable frames and feelings, and gets on swimmingly for a time.

But when the newness of the position is past and gone, when the freshness of his feelings is rubbed off and lost, when the world and the devil begin to pull hard at him, when the weakness of his own heart begins to appear—then it is that he finds out the real difficulties of Christianity. Then he finds that to begin is one thing, and to go on is another. Yes. "Patient continuance in well-doing" is the only sure evidence of grace. It is not he that runs fast at first, or runs furiously, but he that keeps up his speed, who runs so as to obtain. By all means make much of conversion. But let us not be too sure that it is conversion, till Time has set its seal upon it.

Time and wear test metals and prove whether they are solid or plated. So Time and Wear are the surest tests of a man's religion. Where there is spiritual life there will be continuance and steady perseverance. It is the man who goes on as well as begins that is the disciple indeed (John vi. 67–69; Luke xxii. 28; 1 John ii. 19; Heb. iii. 6). [*Ryle.*]

Why should Sin be so inveterate in the Human Hearts.

Dr. Howat, in illustrating a similar sentiment says, "It is the great law of contraries. 'The corruption of the best is the worst,' says the Roman proverb. There is nothing so beautiful as a woman's love; there is nothing so terrible as a woman's hatred. Athaliah, to gratify her own ambition, 'destroys all the seed royal.' The daughter of Herodias solicits the Baptist's head.—Jezebel vows to take Elijah's life.—The pretended mother proposes to slay

the living child." The finer a nature is under its natural conditions it becomes proportionally worse than another nature when it is perverted. If it has a capacity for rising higher in its normal state, it must also have a capacity for sinking lower in its abnormal state. The men of finest gifts and finest sensibilities, when they do sink into the depths of wickedness generally become more abandoned and desperate than the common wicked. For this reason the fallen angelic spirits are more fearful embodiments of all manner of evil than fallen men. Physically speaking too, bodies which have the finest texture, such as the human body, when they do become corrupt, are more loathsome than other bodies. All over the rule holds.

Man's highest faculty is that by which he is capable of knowing God, loving God, admiring and adoring His wonderful perfections, and enjoying His divine fellowship. But the power to rise so high infers his capacity for sinking down to a proportionate depth. And what measure of depth can correspond fitly with the all but measureless height to which it is possible for him to attain. But this capacity for going down to an indefinate depth when his nature is perverted is really the measure of his corruption or depravity. It is like a pit of unfathomed depth. Or speaking of it more literally, the degeneracy is in proportion to the greatness of man's nature—as a rational and immortal being, formed after the image of God. Man's capacity of loving God in his upright state is equalled by the deep and inveterate dislike to God, which he has in his perverted state. Hence, the inveteracy of sin in his fallen nature.

The ancient ring. "A man, wishing to find a handsome ring, went into a jeweller's shop, in Paris, and there had presented to him a very ancient gold ring which seemed to be very superior, and on its inside were two little lion's claws. With this he played for some time, but did not purchase it. Scarcely had he reached home when, first his hand, then his side, then his whole body became numb and without feeling, as if he had had a stroke of the palsy. It grew worse and worse, till a physician was called, and he was thought to be dying. 'You must somehow have taken poison,' said the physician. 'No,' he said, 'I have not.' At last he remembered this ring. On examination it was discovered that he had been playing with what used to be called a death-ring, and which was often employed in the wicked Italian States three or four hundred years ago. When one man hated another and desired to kill him he would present him with one of these rings. In the inside was a drop of deadly poison, and a very small hole out of which it would not make its way except it was squeezed. When the poor man was wearing it, the murderer would come and shake his hand violently; the lion's claw would give his finger a little scratch, and in a few hours he was a dead man."

"For four hundred years this ring had kept its poison, and at the end was strong enough almost to kill the man who had accidentally scratched his finger with the claw. It required great skill and the strongest medicines to save him. *So is it with sin.* Our first father had such a ring put into his hand by the Tempter, and by the unhappy squeezing of the claws he died of it. The same ring has been handed down to his posterity from the days of the Expulsion from Paradise till now; and for well nigh 6,000 years it is still a fatal ring to all who touch it." [*Bib. Treas.*]

The inveteracy of sin is illustrated by the manner in which the plague of leprosy showed itself in its workings, both in the human body and even in human dwellings. When the plague got into the walls of a building, there was no way of getting it cleansed but by taking down the walls to the foundations. "When N. Phocas had built a strong wall about his palace for his own security, in the night time he heard a voice crying to him, O Emperor! though thou build thy wall as high as

the clouds, yet if sin be within, it will overthrow all."

Sin is also a quicksand. It not only penetrates to the very core internally, but externally it swallows up without power of rescue.

"On certain parts of the coast, especially in Scotland, difficulty is experienced in walking—the shore is like pitch, to which the soles of the feet cling. The coast appears to be dry, but the footprint when the foot is lifted, becomes filled with water. There is no appearance of danger, but suddenly the traveller sinks. He looks at his feet, and the sand covers them. He wishes to turn back, but his efforts only make him sink more deeply. With terror he perceives that he is in a quicksand. He throws down his burden, but it is too late. He finds he is slowly being buried alive! The sand reaches to his waist —to his chest—to his neck—now only his face is visible. He cries, but alas! none hear. At last the sand fills his mouth, and all is silent—his eyes, and the curtain is drawn. He is swallowed up. So of the man who persists inveterately in a course of sin." [*Anon.*]

The Deceitfulness of Sin.

"The wages that sin bargains with the sinner are life, pleasure, and profit; but the wages it pays him with are death, torment, and destruction. He that would understand the falsehood and deceit of sin thoroughly, must compare its promises with its payments.". [*South.*]

"The approaches of sin are like the conduct of Jael—'It brings forth butter in a lordly dish.' It bids high for the soul. But when it has fascinated and lulled the victim, the nail and the hammer are behind." [*Cecil.*]

"Sin has always two aspects—that which she assumes before the deed is done, and that which she puts on after having ensnared her dupe, and hung her fetters on his soul. How musical in the ear of Judas was the jingle of the thirty pieces of silver, while the bribe was dangling in the purse of the treasurer of the chief priests and scribes! Yet, how dull was its ring, as he dashed them down upon the table in his agony, after their lustre had been tarnished by the tinge of harmless blood! How fair was the enchantress when she came with her promises; yet how hard and haggard were her mocking features when the mask had fallen and the real face was seen! It is always so. There is many a deadly poison which is pleasant to the taste—many a fatal lullaby which is charming to the ear—many a Dead Sea apple which is tempting to the eye—many a cruel hand which is as soft as velvet. Sin is a siren while she tempts, but an ugly, raw-boned hag when she has her prey within her toils. Those tresses which appear so comely may change to snakes to sting the hand which smooths them; those dove-like, winsome eyes that swim so wantonly shall flash like basilisks upon you, if you are captivated by their blandishments.

"In the Halls of the Inquisition there was a beautiful statue of a virgin. The painter's tenderest strokes had been used to give loveliness to the face, and the sculptor's utmost skill had been enlisted to add charm to charm in the rounded moulding of form and limb. The white arms were undraped, and extended wide as though to embrace; the eye and lip, and whole attitude, were full of winning invitation, and the professing penitent was led into this fair presence, and commanded to advance and embrace the figure. As soon as he drew near, the fair white arms encircled him, not with the caress of love, but with the vice-like clutch of vengeance, and the bosom opened and lips expanded, and a hundred gleaming knives shot from the virgin figure, transfixing the victim with a hundred scarlet stabs. The parted lips pushed forth a barbed tongue, and showed fanged teeth to

acerate and tear. In short, the beauty was transformed into a beast, the fairy form became an armoury of poignards, whose every charm concealed a dagger, and whose every grace was death.

"*So it is with sin.* Decking her bed with roses, she merges her poison-breath amidst their fragrance, and lulls her silly victim with a counterfeit repose. Oh rest not on her pillow, for a serpent coils beneath it! Wander not amidst her bowers, for wasps are honeying amidst her blossoms and leaving their stings in the core of all her fruits. Recline not upon the sunny knolls, for volcanic lava lurks under the moss, and the fire of hell lights up her transient heaven. 'My son! when sinners entice thee, consent thou not.'" [*Mursell.*]

Allurements of sin. "There is a tree called the *Judas tree.* The blossoms appear before the leaves, and they are of brilliant crimson. The flaming beauty of the flowers attracts innumerable insects; and the wandering bee is drawn to it to gather honey. But every bee that alights upon the blossoms imbibes a fatal opiate, and drops dead from among the crimson flowers to the earth. Beneath this enticing tree the earth is strewed with the victims of its fatal fascinations. That fatal plant that attracts only to destroy is a vivid emblem of the deceitfulness and deadliness of sin. For the poison of sin's bewitching flowers, there is but one remedy. It is found "in the leaves of the 'tree of life' that groweth on Mount Calvary." [*Cuyler.*]

Avoid the beginnings of sin. "Those who would not fall into the river must not approach too near the banks. He who crushes the egg need not fear the flight of the bird. He who would not drink of the wine of wrath, must not touch the cup of pleasure. He who would not hear the passing-bell of eternal death, should not finger the rope of sin. The man who carries gunpowder cannot stand too far from the fire. If we go with sin one mile, it will compel us to go twain. It swells like Elijah's cloud, from the size of a man's hand till it covers the whole sky." [*Secker.*]

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verse 3.

III. Resort anew to Prayer. "The children of Israel cried unto the Lord," etc., under their oppression.

This they had done twice before when similarly situated—in the time of the Syrian invasion from the North East, and again when crushed under the heel of the Moabitish king. It indicates two things: (1.) *The whole land became a scene of prayer.* From every corner streams of supplication went up from penitent hearts to Him that was able to save. It was no longer confined to the few Israelites indeed, who were accustomed at all times to call on God, and whom God regarded as his "remembrancers," in times of peace as well as in the evil days; but the whole nation were on their knees. (2.) *The cry was importunate.* The extreme pressure of the calamity made it so. To a large extent, doubtless, the motives were defective, yet God is pleased sometimes to hear an earnest cry and grant the deliverance asked where there is only the *appearance* of genuine prayer. Such is the compassion of His nature. It is, however, only temporal blessings that are so given. Spiritual gifts are reserved for those exclusively who become His children. Where there is faith along with it, importunity is sure to prevail in the long run. But the chief feature to which the God of Israel would have regard in the present case would be the call of His own children, who could hold Him by the girdle of His faithfulness, and who would take no denial. Here we see:

I. The gates of prayer still open. After so long a time, God's ear is still open. Long and grievously had the people sinned. In the face of warning and remonstrance, while the trumpet of reconciliation was blowing, and Mercy kept

pleading and imploring, by every argument she could devise, they sinned. By three long epochs of rebellion against their covenant God, was the page of their history darkened. "Forty years had their God suffered their manners in the wilderness," and now for four times forty more, when settled in the land of their inheritance, had He continued to bear with their frowardness, while not improved, but tending to become worse than before. How could it be expected that His ear would be open to their prayer as at first? Had no Divine jealousy been awakened in the Divine bosom? Were such persistent profanation of the Divine name, and such incorrigible perversity of nature to be always allowed to happen, without producing any change on the privilege of prayer? Might we not fear that Jehovah would now turn to them the back of His throne and allow the arm of His justice to work unimpeded by the voice of mercy? After this people had for 160 years turned a deaf ear to the voice of their God, it was surely natural to expect that He would act as One who had "forgotten to be gracious, and in anger had shut up His tender mercies?" Would he not now say: "When ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you, and when ye make many prayers I will not hear—your hands are full of sins." Yet His ear is still open, and mainly for two reasons:—

1. **God's long-suffering.** From first to last He retains His great name which He made known to Moses. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth." An old writer says: "God's most wonderful attribute is His patience." Though deeply offended with every individual act of sin, He can wait a thousand years before inflicting the punishment due, should the claims of righteousness permit. He is the King Eternal; and His patience is not to be measured by a man's standard. Were it to be so estimated, this people had long ere now been swept off the face of the earth. But His own account of Himself is: "*I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger and destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man. I am Jehovah, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*"

He is far above the irritation and fretfulness of a creature nature. His Majestic Being is not liable to be ruffled by any storms of rebellion that may arise under His throne. With all His supreme hatred to sin, He ever retains absolute self-command. There is no ill-considered haste (as often happens with man), in closing up the channels of mercy on account of extreme provocation given. "The Lord is slow to anger" (Nah. i. 3), literally, *of wide nostrils* אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם. When the nostrils are narrow, the anger that burns in the bosom has little room to escape, so that there is great agitation in the frame. But when the nostrils are wide, the heaving of the bosom is relieved, and there is free outlet. There is no agitation or heaving of the nature when the anger comes forth. There is great anger, yet absolute self-possession. There is vehement anger, yet no hasty expression of it. In verse 2 it is said, "The Lord is בַּעַל חֵמָה *a master of anger*," as if He could command the possession of it to any extent; and yet He retains perfect composure. So differently must we think of God from the thoughts we have of man. His anger is never wrongly directed, nor breaks loose from control, as blind passion does in the case of man.

It is added, "He is great in power." He not only has power over all the creatures, but has power also over Himself. He shows this in being guided not by mere feeling, but by holy principles in the expression of His anger, by righteousness, truth, and faithfulness as well as mercy and compassion (Num. xiv. 18). Our God is "the God of patience." (Rom. xv. 5). "He waits to be gracious," and so keeps the gate of mercy open all the day of life long. His patience is the silence of His justice, and the tender whispering of His mercy.

2. Provision is made for keeping the gates open. The way of approach to God is called "a living way"; a way which must always continue open, on account of what has been done both to get it opened, and to keep it open. It is a way that cannot be blocked up. It is like a fountain that always keeps flowing. Everything in the gospel is of a living character. It speaks of a "living hope" (or "lively"), one that will never wither; "living bread," such as never becomes moulded, and gives life to him that partakes of it; "living water" and "living fountains of water," always fresh and refreshing; and "living stones," stones possessing the strange property of life, without losing the properties of solidity, strength, and durability. And the way of access is a "living way." How is it so?

(1.) **The propitiating blood is always efficacious.** The Lamb in the midst of the throne always appears "*as it had been slain*," *i.e.* as if *newly slain*. The blood seems fresh to this day, as if in the act of trickling from the wound. It never coagulates or becomes vitiated, but is always warm and full of virtue, as when it first flowed from the vein. There is "no remembrance any more of the sins" that are confessed over this sacrifice. "We are sanctified by the offering of the person of Jesus Christ once for all." (Heb. ix. 26.) His blood is "a fountain opened for sin," without any stone on the mouth of it, and it flows perennially.

(2) **The great Intercessor lives to keep it open.** It cannot be that any work of a Divine person should be merely temporary. For His own honour and for the Father's honour He lives to see that His great work should have everlasting results. "Our great High Priest is passed into the heavens—let us therefore come boldly unto the throne." "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." "This man continueth ever." Seen by the seer of Patmos in His exalted and permanent state, in the heavenly world, He was "clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the breasts with a golden girdle," *i.e.* the robe of blue, the distinctive official robe of the high priest, showing that in heaven He was still at work, and always could continue to be at work in His priestly character keeping the way of access open. He also had on "the curious girdle of the ephod," which was virtually the working coat of the priestly office.

(3.) **God's names imply that the gates are always open.** He is addressed as—"Thou that hearest prayer," as if that were His perpetual attitude toward man. He is often called "the God of Jacob," and He often takes this name to Himself, because of the delight He takes in those who have much of the spirit of prayer. Still more emphatic is the corresponding name—"the God of Israel"—the God of the man who, in prayer, "as a prince, had power with God and prevailed." It is also recorded, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain." It is implied also in the name, "the God of peace," which implies that He is accessible to men. Or, more emphatically still, He is said to be "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," etc. This is His fixed attitude throughout New Testament times.

(4.) **His seat implies it.** It is a "throne of grace." Anciently it was called a "mercy-seat," because blood was sprinkled upon it, and justice, however stern, was satisfied, so that Mercy could freely flow forth. And now through all time, "He slumbers not." A suppliant never can come and find the gate shut.

(5.) **His standing promises regarding prayer imply it.** "His ears are open to the cry of the righteous." "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him." "Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee." "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He will bring it to pass." "And all the promises of God are in Christ, yea, and in Him, Amen."

(6.) **His readiness to hear every class of suppliants implies it.** Even the ruthless persecutor of God's church (Acts ix. 11); the bloody Manasseh (II. Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13); the destitute, and the groaning prisoner

(Ps. cii. 17, [illegible]); those who accept the punishment of their iniquity (Lev. xxvi. 41, 42); the broken hearted penitent (Ps. li. 17); the penitent thief (Luke xxiii. 42, 43); and many others.

(7.) **His constant attitude of expectancy that men will pray to Him.** "When thou prayest, be not as the hypocrites," implying that they are expected to pray without being told to do so. Mark xi. 24; John xiv. 13, 14; xv. 7; Jer. xxix. 12, 13; xxxi. 18, etc.; Isa. lxv. 24; lviii. 9; Eph. iii. 20.

"The doors of the church are thrown open but once a week, and the communion table is but occasionally spread; but the pages of the Bible are always open, and the gates of prayer, like those of heaven, are never shut. Prayer is like a private postern, through which by night as well as by day, we have the privilege of access to the palace and the presence of the King. Prayer is the first door that is open to us, and it is the last that is shut. When a man is tossing on his death-bed and cannot read his Bible; when even he is unable to give assent to the promises that we pour into his ear, he still can offer up some petitions to the throne of grace. Mark those moving lips! behold he prayeth! and his spirit flies heavenward on the wings of prayer." [*Guthrie.*]

II. The baseness of praying to God only in adversity. *While the suns of peace shone*, these Israelites gave themselves to the worship of idols, and indulged themselves in their sins. They refused to walk with God and cast His laws behind their backs. But when the storm now arises, and the waves of trouble threaten to overwhelm them, immediately they return confessing their error. It is indeed right to pray and confess sin under all circumstances. But what should we think of a friend that never paid us a visit except when he had got into difficulties and came merely to borrow. To pray to God only in emergencies, after we have tried other refuges all round and found them false, and we go to Him as a last resort because we cannot do better—this is most base, and might well fill a man with shame and confusion of face. "The servile man plies his prayers, as sailors do their pumps, only in a storm, or when fearful of sinking." [*Secker.*]

The proper rule of the christian life is to keep up intercourse with God *at all times*. *David* says, "I have set the Lord always before me; He is at my right hand. Evening, morning, and at noon will I pray and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice." How diligent and proficient he was in closet duties and exercises these perennially interesting Psalms testify. The result was, he was not "greatly moved" even when the mountain billows passed over him. *Cornelius* "prayed to God always." In due time an abundant answer was given. *Daniel* at the height of power knelt before his God three times a day, and could be calm under the stern trial through which he had to pass. *Job* was careful to keep up intercourse with God in his family-circle in the day of prosperity, and so stood prepared for the day of adversity. Read the first paragraph of Job I. with the last paragraph, and see how "the prudent man forseeth the evil and hideth himself."

The condition of heathen families is described as that of those who "do not call on God's name." God complains of His own Israel that they restrained prayer before Him. Is. xliii. 22; Ps. lxxxi. 10, 11; Hos. v. 4, with verse 15 and vi. 1–3. Not till He slew them did they return and inquire after God. Ps. lxxviii. 34. But when trouble was removed, "they turned back and tempted God," comp. Deut. xxxii. 15. Here Jehovah complains that notwithstanding God's goodness to them in settling them in the land, "they forsook the Lord God of their fathers and served other gods." Only when a mountain wave overwhelmed them did they think of coming back to their God.

Beecher says, "How poor is prayer when men are driven to it by the whip, and they resort to it only when they feel the lash of trouble on their back! What would you think of a son that never went home to his father, except

when he was in debt, and had the sheriff at his heels, and wanted help; but the moment that he obtained relief forgot that father again, and had no further intercourse with him till he was again in trouble?"

III. Prayer specially suitable to times of great distress. Though it was base to come to God only in great emergencies, it was natural and most proper that Israel should come to Him as their refuge in the day of great calamity. For "to whom should a people go but to their God?" The whole Book of Psalms is the record of seeking God in distress, with the invariable happy result of doing so. Many special examples of the wisdom of such a course occur throughout Scripture—1 Sam. xxx. 6; Gen. xxxii. 7, 9–12, 24–30; Ex. xvii. 11, 12; xxxii. 10–14; Josh. vii. 6–9; Jud. xv. 18, 19; Isa. xxxviii. 1–5; Dan. ix; James v. 13; Ps. l. 15; cxxx. 1; Matt. viii. 25; xvii. 14, 15; Jon. i. 6; John xi. 3, 21, 22; Acts vi. 4; xii. 12; Rom. xii. 12; Eph. vi. 18 (in the evil day); iii. 13, 14; Col. iv. 2, 3; 2 Thess. iii. 1, 2; Heb. iv. 16 (time of need); 1 Pet. v. 7.

Gethsemane teaches us profound lessons on this subject, both by precept and example; and it is by following the Master's example in "offering up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that is able to save," that we may expect to fight our way successfully to the crown of glory. It is through prayer that all great deliverances come now. Thus Joshua gained every battle; thus Joseph rose from the pit of Dothan and the dungeons of Egypt to the position of being ruler over all the land of Egypt; thus Hezekiah turned the tide of battle to the gate, when encompassed with formidable hosts; thus Elijah proved more than a match for the King of Israel with the whole nation at his back; thus Jacob changed the heart of his brother Esau, and earned an undying fame; thus Samson "out of weakness became strong," and slew more of the enemy at his death than he had done during his life; thus Jonah escaped from the most hopeless prison into which a living man was ever cast; thus Paul and Silas awakened the slumbering arm of Omnipotence, and the solid walls of their prison shook, while the barred and bolted gates became loose in a moment, as flax at the touch of fire; thus, too, did the Apostles gain all their victories against the enemies of the Church in the early years of her ever-memorable history.

"*Sinking times are praying times* with the Lord's people. Peter neglected prayer when starting on his perilous journey, but when he began to sink his danger made him a suppliant, and his cry, though late, was not too late. In our hours of bodily pain and mental anguish, we find ourselves as naturally driven to prayer as the wreck is driven upon the shore by the waves. The fox hies to its hole for protection; the bird flies to the wood for shelter; and so the tried believer hastens to the mercy-seat for safety. Heaven's great harbour of refuge is All Prayer; thousands of weather-beaten vessels have found a haven there, and the moment a storm comes on, it is wise for us to make for it with all sail." [*Spurgeon.*]

IV. Great trials lead to greater earnestness in prayer. It was when these Israelites came into deep waters that they found the practical value of the privilege of prayer; it was then too that they began in good earnest to pray. The more crushing the calamity that befel them, and the deeper sense they had of their own insufficiency to cope with it, the more eager was their application to the divine footstool, and the more fast was the hold they took of the divine promises. It is when "deep calls unto deep" that prayer becomes a cry. Langour is exchanged for ardour, and the soul pants with desire for the blessing needed. Lukewarmness disappears, and all the force of the instinct of self-preservation is thrown into the cry for relief. Its language is, "My heart and

flesh cry out for the living God." There is a pouring out of the heart before God. The heart is enlarged. Prayer is no longer a bondage but a blessed relief. An old writer remarks, "As music upon the water sounds farther and more harmoniously than upon the land, so do prayers joined with tears."

Would Jacob have wrestled so hard but for the great pressure put upon him by the approach of the revengeful Esau? Would Abraham have carried on the argument so skilfully on behalf of doomed Sodom but for the fact that he knew the ministers of wrath were already on their way, and were on the point of pouring out their vials? Would David have been so excellent a pattern of the manner in which closet duties should be performed, had he not been so often cast into the furnace when seven times heated? He who has sounded the lowest depths of sorrow can take the firmest grasp of the girdle of the Divine faithfulness. And he who has been most heavily overloaded with a weight of care and anxiety is likely to become most skilful in the use of the weapon—all-prayer. Thus does God bring good out of evil, and make great trials "yield in the end the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verse 3.

The Excellence of Prayer.

Prayer and an open Bible are the greatest of all Christian privileges. They constitute the means by which all others are enjoyed. It is through these that the devout believing soul transacts all its business of communion with God. Through the one we make known all our thoughts, wishes and feelings to our God; and through the other God speaks to us, revealing His mind and will. Prayer, of which only we now speak, is also a highly elevating and purifying exercise. "It is, in one choice handful, Heaven!" For the work of Heaven is praise, arising from answered prayer. It is the soul in audience with its God, heaving sighs at the footstool which shall become songs on the throne. From no exercise can greater soul-profit be reaped when it is well performed. It is fitting therefore that now, when the subject is before us formally, it should be carefully considered.

I. Prayer specially glorifying to God.

It is so for two reasons:—

1. It ascribes to God the glory of His perfections. Prayer does this by its very attitude, and as offered in the name of Christ, whatever the special matter of the petitions presented may be, or whatever confessions are made.

(1.) It assumes His *sovereignty*—that He is the Great Supreme, before whom every knee shall bow, "of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things,"—the Maker of all, the Possessor of all, and the Worshipped of all. The great Roman said, "I will be Cæsar or no one." Prayer assumes that if God is to be acknowledged as God, He must be held as Sovereign in His own universe—that the first duty of the creature should be to adore and obey its Creator, and that all the blessings which God confers on his creatures are bestowed of His own good pleasure.

(2.) It ascribes to Him *all-sufficiency*—that He possesses boundless riches of blessings. The suppliant feels himself but a tiny insect at the door of the Divine all sufficiency, just as an ant might be supposed to lie at the door of a large storehouse, but could only take a single grain of wheat from the vast abundance.

(3.) It ascribes *boundless benevolence*—that He is so kind, as of His own goodness to open His hand and supply the wants of every living thing. It supposes that He finds the greatest

pleasure in making His creatures happy by showering His gifts upon them, through Jesus Christ, the appointed channel.

(4.) It assumes *His faithfulness and truth*—that He cannot violate His word, but will remain true to His promises in all circumstances and times.

(5.) It supposes Him to be *omnipresent*—so that from any spot on earth, or in the vast creation, prayer might rise up before Him.

(6.) It also ascribes *omniscience*—that He can hear the thoughts and musings of the heart, equally with the utterances of the voice.

(7.) And *omnipotence*—that He can do all that is asked without fail—no proper wish but He can gratify; no want but He can supply; no danger but He can remove; no fear but He can dissipate; no enemy but He can subdue—that "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

(8.) Also *unchangeableness* — that however often we approach, and however changing the circumstances, He is always the same in character—a rock amid a sea of change—that the "strength of Israel will not lie."

All this is assumed by every right-hearted petitioner that comes before the Divine footstool, and thus prayer is reckoned to be most honouring to God.

2. In prayer the creature takes its right place before God—and so God is greatly honoured. It is weakness laying hold of strength—the child of yesterday, throwing itself into the arms of the Everlasting Father—the thing made, bowing itself before Him that made it. It is the empty cistern placing itself at the fountain-head. It is the homage of felt subjection rendered to acknowledged supremacy. Prayer offered through Christ as the appointed way of approach to God is the soul coming to the throne of God's holiness on His own terms laid down for receiving the guilty and undeserving.

Prayer is often the exercise in which the soul passes out of darkness into light, or when it first draws the breath of spiritual life. It marks the moment when the soul becomes "dead unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ the Lord." Thus does prayer on all sides greatly honour God.

But all is not prayer that is called prayer. When prayer is a mere formality, it is not counted. Though Saul of Tarsus prayed for years with devout regularity as a Pharisee, none of his exercises were listened to till he began to pray as a penitent. On the same principle, most prayers of most people are never counted prayers at all. A man who had been taught to pray when he was three years' old, and was converted in his old age, used to say: "I am the old man who said his prayers for seventy years, and yet all the time never prayed at all." It is of the greatest importance to know what kind of offerings will be acceptable to God. There is a holy skill in the conducting of this exercise which all who really wish to draw down blessings from above, must set themselves to learn. There is an art in prayer, and the art mainly is to be, above all things natural.

Luther understood this art when he adopted the motto—"*bene precasse est bene studuisse.*" When most pressed with gigantic toils, he said: "I have so much to do that I cannot get on without three hours a day of praying."

General Havelock rose at four, if the hour for marching was six, rather than lose the precious privilege of communion with God before setting out.

Sir Matthew Hale says: "If I omit praying and reading God's Word in the morning, nothing goes well all day."

Dr. Payson, when a student, said: "Since I began to beg God's blessing on my studies, I have done more in one week than in a whole year before." These men knew the art of acceptable prayer.

II. Acceptable Prayer.

All true prayer to God will be

answered sooner or later in some form. There is not a single case of refusal on record. Such a case as that of Moses is only an apparent exception. (Deut. iii. 25. 26). He got more than an equivalent. "The Lord buried him," and after death he opened his eyes on the heavenly Canaan! "*Everyone* that asketh receiveth." No man ever yet perished at mercy's gate. No petition sincerely offered in the name of Jesus ever fell to the ground. Look at the long list of applicants who came to Jesus "in the days of His flesh." None were put away. It is not doubtful whether we shall be answered, if we pray in the required spirit — humbly, penitently, believingly. But we must leave God to take His own *time* and His own *way* of giving the answer.

Were there only a possibility of success, such is the urgency of our case as sin-burdened and helpless, that we might well implore our God importunately to answer us. The four lepers at the gate of Samaria acted on a mere peradventure (II. Kings vii. 3–5), yet were successful. Esther was not sure of the king's favour, yet she went in to the royal presence. Jonah's companions in the ship could only say "call on thy God *if so be* that God will think on us." The heathen deities were supposed often to spurn their suppliants away instead of hearing them. Yet not the less earnestly did they come again with the cry, "O Baal, hear us!" But we have the sure word of Him who is "the Amen — Faithful and True." (Matt. xxi. 22.) What an encouragement to ask, seek, knock until it be opened to us!

Acceptable prayer must be :—

1. **Personal** — the exercise of the man himself. His own heart must be engaged in it, though there should be a thousand present. Without this there might be "dew on the ground" all round about, but our "fleece" would be dry. It will not do to have others praying for us; we must also pray for ourselves. We must also often pray alone; for we have sinned alone, must die alone, and will be judged alone. We should have our own secret place for meeting with God —our "fig tree," like Nathanael; our "house-top," like Peter; the open "field," like Isaac; the "plain," like Ezekiel; the "river-side," like Daniel; or even the "dungeon," like Jeremiah; "the depths," like David; down "at the bottom of the mountains," like Jonah; or like the Master Himself, "the desert place or the mountain side."

2. **Simple and sincere.** (*a*) *Not artificial, not mechanical.* What a drudgery is such prayer! The mere pronouncing of words for a certain length of time, along with the bending of the knee, is by many reckoned a respectful offering up of prayer. And yet it is scarcely better than the conduct of the Thibetan, who puts his written prayers into a cylinder, which revolves on a handle, and which he twirls by the aid of a ball and chain, each revolution counting for an offering of the enclosed petition. Sometimes the cylinder is attached to running water, and thus "praying without ceasing" is carried on by water-power. We pity the poor Buddhist, who ties his prayers to a bamboo stick and waves them many times before his idol god, each oscillation being a repetition of the prayer; or, we pity the Tavist, in China who writes out a statement of his case on paper, with a request accompanying it, and then entrusts it to the priest who burns it, and determines for the suppliant whether his case will be considered favourably by the god or not. Yet what better is the position of the man who repeats formally the words of prayer, without having in his heart anything of the spirit of the exercise? Better indeed than the mere formalist was the case of the man who wished sincerely to pray, but, being entirely ignorant of how to proceed, went every morning before the Lord, and repeated the letters of the alphabet saying, "and now, O good God, put these letters together into words, to

make such sense as may be most to thy glory and my good."

(*b*) *real.* The talk of the little child has nothing in it of the grace of speech or beauty of language, and yet it is more pleasing to the father's ear than the sweetest music, or the most mellifluous phraseology. So it is with the hearer of prayer, who, "before all temples made with hands, prefers the upright heart and true." It is said of Him, "thou desireth truth in the inward parts." The great art in praying is to be artless. Eloquence or any straining for effect is a blemish, and a detraction from the acceptability of prayer. The more natural and true, the nearer to success. Our interjections may be prayers. Our sighing may be praying. The bursting forth of our real feelings or wishes, however simple the clothing. A grief or a care, or a genuine wish, expressed by a penitent, humble heart, trusting in the Saviour's advocacy, and relying on the Divine promises is the kind of offering which God desires.

3. **Reverent.** He whom the Father always hears teaches us to approach Him with these words on our lips—"Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name!" "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are about Him." *South* says, "we are to keep our distance from God in our very approaches to Him." We approach to an Infinite Majesty; One who fills heaven and earth, before whom the seraphim cry aloud, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty!" We come as dust and ashes, confessing we are vile, and rebels against the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Therefore our spirit ought to be that of the publican (Luke xviii. 13), or that of Elijah, when "he cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees" (1 Kings xviii. 42), or that of Abraham when he said, "Behold, I have now taken upon me to speak unto the Lord;" "O, let not the Lord be angry and I will speak" (Gen. xviii. 27–32); or that even of the seraphim, each of whom with two of his wings covered his face, as being ashamed, though a seraph, to stand uncovered before so much excellence; with other two wings he covered his feet, lest even a seraph's foot should pollute ground so holy; and with his remaining two wings he stood ready to fly swiftly as the lightning, at the lightest whisper that comes from the throne. The holiest of creatures are the most full of godly fear, and have their places nearest the throne.

4. **Believing.** This exercise is the very least we can give to God as a foundation of intercourse with Him—to trust Him in all that He does, and believe Him in all that He says. But on that footing a great deal may be done—the whole business of the soul's salvation may be transacted. If we but believe all He has told us about Christ as a Saviour, and trust His character as revealed in Christ, what a mighty impression it must make on the heart. We shall have "boldness at the throne"—the boldness of the little child that climbs his father's knee, and throws his arms around his neck.

"Prayer is the key of heaven, and faith is the hand that turns it. Faith is to prayer as the feather is to the arrow; faith feathers the arrow of prayer, and makes it fly swifter and pierce the throne of grace. Prayer that is faithless is fruitless" (Mark xi. 24). [*Watson.*]

Many pray to God for pardon and peace, for hope and spiritual joy, as if they did not believe that God were listening to their words, or as if they thought He grudged to give them such things. The promises made to believe in prayer are most explicit (Matt. xxi. 22; John xiv. 13, 14; Mark ix. 23; James i. 5, 6; Jer. xxix. 12, 13; John xv. 7; xvi. 24; 1 John v. 14, 15).

5. **With the use of all the arguments.** When an advocate undertakes to plead a cause, he looks at the case on all sides, and, not content with one argument or two, he carefully treasures up every plea he can devise, so that by

any means he may bring off his case successfully And when we come before God we are directed "to take with us words"—both our own words suitable for expressing our needs and desires, and also such words as God has supplied us with as arguments, in order to plead with Him. We are like Job, though not in his self-justifying spirit to "order our cause before God, and fill our mouth with arguments." We are not to be content with always quoting the same passages of Scripture—those with which we are most familiar—but to turn over the whole Bible in every part, and make use of all its promises and gracious statements, each in turn. God wishes us to honour every part of His word on the one hand, and on the other He delights to see us gathering up all the pleas with which He has furnished us, so as to make the most of our case. He loves us to reason with Him, "Come, let us reason together." "Produce your cause with the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob." "Hear, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, for the Lord hath a controversy with His people." And especially is it said, "Put me in remembrance, let us plead together, declare thou, that thou mayst be justified." This is a direct call to make use of all the promises or examples, or gracious statements that we find anywhere within the limit of the blessed volume, which contains the revelation of God's will, and to hold Him by the girdle of His faithfulness, saying, "We will not let thee go, except thou bless us." The mightier anyone is in the word, the mightier will he be in prayer.

6. **Fervent.** The blessings of God's hand are so valuable, we are in such necessity to have them, and there are such strong reasons for our losing no time to secure them, that a state of fervour is the natural frame for us always to cultivate. Also God is much more disposed to answer an earnest wish than a feeble wish, for the former puts a higher estimate on His blessings than the other. Hence the power of Elijah's prayers (James v. 16–18).

"*Cold prayer is no more prayer than painted fire is fire.* Fervency is to prayer what fire was to the spices in the censer; it makes it ascend to heaven as a sweet perfume. Prayer without fervency is no prayer; it is speaking, not praying: lifeless prayer is no more prayer than the picture of a man is a man. Fervent prayer, like a petard set against heaven's gates makes them fly open. Christ prayed with strong cries." [*Watson*].

"One great extremity is approaching death. What can then support us? Prayer—Fervent, earnest, wrestling prayer. With our blessed Lord, prayer was a refuge from the storm; almost every word He uttered during that tremendous scene was prayer—the most earnest, the most urgent; repeated, continued proceeding from the recesses of the soul; private, solitary; prayer for deliverance, for strength, above all for resignation." [*Paley.*]

"A small vessel with smart gales will sail faster than a large ship with small winds. When prayer mounts on the wing of fervour *to* God, then answers come down like lightning *from* God." [*Seeker.*]

"The arrow, though well pointed and feathered, is of little use unless pulled to the head by a strong hand." [*Pilkington.*]

Prayer if only dribbled forth from careless lips falls at our feet. It is the strength of fervour which sends it to heaven, and makes it pierce the clouds. It is not the *arithmetic* of our prayers, how many they are; nor the *rhetoric* of our prayers, how eloquent they be; nor the *geometry* of our prayers, how long they be; nor their *music*, how sweet the voice may be; nor their *logic*, how argumentative they may be; nor their *method*, how orderly they may be; nor even their *divinity*, how good their doctrine may be—which God values. But *fervency of spirit* "availeth much." (James v. 16.) [*Bp. Hall.*]

"It is like the rope in the belfry. Prayer pulls the rope below, and the great bell rings above in the ears of

God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly; others give but an occasional pluck at the rope; but he who wins heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continuously with all his might." [*Spurgeon.*]

7. Daily and without ceasing.

Beecher says, "Let the day have a blessed baptism by giving your first waking thoughts into the bosom of God. The first hour of the morning is the rudder of the day."

Spurgeon says, "Keep on pulling the bell in the belfry, and though the bell is so high up that you cannot hear it ring, depend upon it it can be heard in the tower of heaven, and is ringing before the throne of God, who will give you answers of peace according to your faith."

Trapp says, "A good Christian is daily either praying or praising, or both. He drives a constant trade betwixt earth and heaven."

Henry says, "Prayer is the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening."

Guthrie says, "It is as impossible for the soul to live and thrive without daily prayer as for the body to do so without daily food. Our graces are like plants that need daily watering; watches that need daily winding; lamps that need daily filling; bodies that need daily feeding."

Talmage says, "A good day begins with God; a wise merchant would no more think of going to business without communion with Christ than of going to the store without coat, hat, or shoes. I had a poor watch and used to set it every morning in order to make a guess from it about the time of day. Our souls are poor timepieces, utterly out of order. Every morning we need to set them by the Sun of Righteousness."

Gurnall says, "He who closes his eyes at night without prayer lies down before his bed is made. He is like a foolish captain in a garrison who betakes himself to rest before he has set the *watch* for the city's safeguard. God is His people's keeper; but can he expect to be kept by Him, who chargeth not Divine Providence with his keeping? The angels pitch their tents round the saints' dwellings, but as the drum calls the watch together, so God expects that by humble prayer we beg of Him their ministry and attendance."

Gurnall adds (in 1 Thess. v. 17), service and prayer are the warp and woof of the Christian life, of which every part of it is composed. Both are in the groundwork of the stuff. Prayer at stated seasons is good and necessary; but a proper Christian will find it impossible to confine his prayers to stated seasons. He will discover that—

> "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
> The Christian's native air,"

and that to attempt to carry on the spiritual life without more prayer than a short recital in the morning and the same on retiring to rest is equally absurd with a man opening his casement morning and evening and inhaling the fresh air for a few minutes, and then saying to himself that amount of breathing will suffice for the rest of the day. We must always be in the spirit of prayer, and so "pray without ceasing."

Salter put it, "The bird is not always on the wing, but is ready to fly at any moment."

8. Importunate. No Christian should in any case despond, because for a time he is not heard. The rule laid down for all by the Master Himself is, that "*men should always pray and not faint.*" Nay, we must go further. Since our privilege is so great in having a living advocate on high—a Great High Priest within the veil, we ought to "come boldly to the throne of grace," as those who are assured of being heard. We are to throw an earnestness into our prayers like that of Jacob (Gen. xxxii. 26,)—to "pray with groanings or desires that are too great for expression." When we can put our finger on a promise, and go to God with "Thou saidst," our course is to be severe importunately, for God cannot deny Himself, and we are sure of success if we hold on.

"Our prayers are our bills of exchange, and they are allowed in heaven, when they come from trustful and earnest hearts; but if we be broken in our religion and bankrupts of grace, God will protest our bills; He will not be won with our prayers. [*Adams.*]

How often have I seen a little child throw its arms round its father's neck, and win by kisses and importunities what had been refused? Is God less pitiful than we? [*Guthrie.*]

9. Submissive. Everything we receive from the throne of grace is a favour—an undeserved gift, and therefore *all* that we ask should be asked in submission to the will of the Great Giver. The tone of every right prayer should be, "Not my will but thine be done!" Besides, it would be presumptuous in us to be supposed to dictate to God what He should give us. It is not for us on any account to prescribe to Him. We dare not suppose that He will bestow His gifts according to our caprice or ill-considered wishes, but according to what he judges to be wise and good. Farther, it might often be the case that the prayers which we offer up, and those of the blessed Advocate might conflict, so that He might be asking one thing for us at the throne while we might be asking another.

"*Many times Jesus and His people pull against one another in prayer.* You bend your knee and say, "Father, I will that thy saints be with me where *I* am." Christ says, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where *I* am." Thus the disciple is at cross-purposes with his Lord. The beloved one cannot be with Christ and with you too. Now, which pleader shall win the day? If the king himself should step from his throne and put it to you, "Here are two supplicants praying in opposition to one another; which shall be answered?" Surely you would say, "Well, whatever it costs me, Jesus, not my will, but thine be done!" [*Spurgeon.*]

10. Watchful. He that prays and watches not, is like him that sows a field with precious seed, but leaves the gate open for hogs to come in and root it up; or him that takes great pains to get money, but no care to lay it up safely when he hath it." [*Gurnall.*]

We ought to watch our prayers to see what success we have at the throne. "Children shoot arrows on purpose to loose them, and never so much as look where they light; but men when they shoot, aim at the mark, and go after the arrow, to see how near it falls. So wicked carnal men when they have *said*, not *made* their prayers to Almighty God, it is but *opus operatum*, they have no more regard of them; but God's children, when they on bended knee dart out their prayers, eye them up into heaven, observe how God entertains them, and wait for a happy return, at His good will and pleasure." [*Wilkinson.*]

We are to *add watchfulness and thanksgiving together.* "Prayer and thanks are like the double motion of the lungs; the air that is sucked in by prayer, is breathed forth again by thanks."

"Let your requests be made known with thanksgiving. As God hath an open hand to give, so He hath an open eye to see who comes to His door, and to discern between the thankful beggar and the unthankful." [*Gurnall.*]

11. In the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is said to "*help our infirmities*," and to "*make intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.*" He is called "*the Spirit of grace and of supplications*" (Zech. xii. 10). We are said to "*pray in the Holy Ghost*" (Jude 20). We "*pray with all prayer and supplication*" only by the help of "*the Spirit*" (Eph. vi. 18).

"We must implore the help of God's Spirit to fix our minds, and make them intent and serious in prayer. The ship without a pilot rather floats than sails. That our thoughts do not float up and down in prayer, we need the Blessed Spirit to be our pilot to steer us. A shaking hand may as well write a line steadily, as we can keep our hearts fixed

in prayer without the Spirit of God." [*Watson.*]

"As the sails of a ship carry it into the harbour, so prayer carries us to the throne and the bosom of God. But as the sails cannot of themselves speed the progress of a vessel unless filled with a favourable breeze, so the Holy Spirit must breathe on our hearts, or our prayers will be motionless and lifeless." [*Toplady.*]

There is need of a spiritual frame in prayer. Our offering must be "in spirit and truth." The arrow which is shot from a loose cord drops powerless to the ground; but from the tightly drawn bow-string it springs forward, soars upward and reaches the object to which it is directed. So it is not the loose utterance of attempted prayer that is effectual, but the strong earnestness of the heart sending its pointed petitions to heaven, that reaches the Divine ear, and obtains the desired blessing." [*Bowden.*]

We must take delight in our prayers, and in order to do this must have the Spirit resting on us. "Delight is the marrow of religion. It makes the melody, without which prayer would be but a harsh sound. God accepts the heart's offering when it is a gift given, not forced. Joy is the tuning of the soul. We are first to 'Rejoice evermore,' then 'Pray without ceasing.' Dullness is not suitable to the excellence of the things we pray for. Gospel blessings are a feast. Manna from heaven is not to be sought for with a dumpish heart. With joy we must draw the water out of the wells of salvation. Faith is the bucket, but joy and love are the hands that move it. They are the Aaron and Hur that hold up the hands of Moses." [*Charnock.*]

Men never weary of the shining of the sun; so a man who is taught of the Spirit will never weary of spiritual exercises. "The Spirit dwells in us," and does not depart. Hence there is provision for being always in a devout frame.

"When thou art wrestling like Jacob and art nearly thrown down, ask the Holy Spirit to nerve thine arm. The Holy Spirit is the chariot wheel of prayer. Prayer may be the chariot the desire may draw it forth; but the Spirit is the very wheel whereby it moveth." [*Spurgeon.*]

III. Advantages of Prayer. Prayer is of such extensive advantage to the Christian, that it may be said to be an envelope for the whole Christian life. *Swinnock* says, "As every sacrifice was to be seasoned with salt, so every undertaking and affliction must be sanctified with prayer. It shows the excellence of gold that it is laid upon silver itself, and so it speaks the excellency of prayer, that not only natural but even religious actions are overlaid with it. We pray not only before we eat and drink, but also before we feed on the bread of the word and the bread in the sacrament. Prayer is needed to get a blessing on every providence and every ordinance; it is also needed to make our callings successful. Prayer secures the fort-royal of the heart; it is the porter that keeps the door of the lips; it is the strong hilt which defendeth the hands; it perfumes every relation in life; helps us to profit by every condition; is the chemist that turns all into gold; and is the master workman, who being out of the way, the whole trade stands still, or goeth backward. What the key is to the watch, that prayer is to religion, it winds it up, and sets it going."

The advantages of prayer are incalculable.

1. It is always good for the soul to be in the presence of its God. "The mind wants steadying and setting right many times a day. It is like a compass placed on a ricketty table; the least stir of the table makes the needle swing round and point untrue. It must settle till it points aright. Stand awhile in the presence of Jesus, in the attitude of prayer, and the thing that worries you will soon drop as a sediment to the bottom, and the soul shall be no longer turbid." [*Goulburn.*]

As the earth moves round the sun, exposing every part of its surface in turn to receive his enlightening beams,

and be warmed by his genial rays, so by the habit of having recourse to God in prayer in all our states and moods of mind, we are blessed with His charming presence in all our mental experiences however varied. Amid all the dark phases of Providential dealings, we ever turn round to receive afresh the light of the Divine countenance and say, "Truly this light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." Like Moses in the cleft of the rock we are strengthened by a mere glimpse of the Divine countenance (Ps. xlii. 5, la. cl.).

Trench says, "*If we would measure in some sort the gains of this communion with God*, think how much we gain by intercourse with good and holy men, and then conclude from the less to the greater. What ennobling influences does it exercise on the character to live in habitual fellowship with the excellent of the earth, whose conversation is in heaven, and whose tone of mind is always lofty and pure! Unconsciously we catch something of their spirit, and feel that we inhale an atmosphere of health. But how incomparably mightier the reactive influence for good, when we continually enjoy the presence of Him who is highest, purest, and best—in whom all perfections meet, and from whom all true nobleness proceeds!"

Newman adds, "*Prayer has a natural effect in spiritualising the soul.* A man is not what he was before—gradually he imbibes a new set of ideas, and becomes imbued with fresh principles. He is as one coming from king's courts with a grace, delicacy, dignity, and propriety—a justness of thought and taste, a clearness and firmness of principle, all his own. As speech is the organ of human society, so is prayer the instrument of Divine fellowship and Divine training."

Beecher's conception is, "Prayer is chiefly translation or transfiguration. It was worth more to Peter, James, and John to stand for an hour and see the spirits drawn through the heaven, and talk with Christ, whose face shone as the sun, than if the three tabernacles which they craved had been built of diamonds and rubies on the mountain-tops. It is what we get by the *soul* that makes us rich."

2. Prayer is the appointed channel for receiving spiritual blessings. "*Ask* and ye shall receive." "*Open thy mouth* and I will fill it." "Ye have not, because *ye ask not.*" We must *seek* if we are to find. It is the *hungry* soul that is filled with good things. "Prayer is the vessel by which the good man is continually trading with the Holy Land; he sendeth it out fraught with precious graces—faith hope, desire, love, godly sorrow, and it cometh home many times richly laden with peace, joy and increase of faith."

The very heathens seemed to feel instinctively that prayer was the natural way of receiving blessing from their God. *Pericles*, the great Athenian statesman, never addressed an audience without first praying to the gods. *Cornelius Scipio*, the great Roman General, when he assumed the toga, never undertook any affair of importance without having passed some time alone in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. "The best and noblest action," says *Plato*, "which a virtuous man can perform, and that which will most promote his success in life, is to live by vows and prayers, in continual intercourse with the gods; nay, all who would act with due consideration, ought, before beginning any undertaking, great or small, to invoke the Deity."

3. The warrant is to expect much. "*Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive that your joy may be full.*" (John xvi. 23, 24; xiv. 13, 14; xv. 7, 16.) The terms are "*anything*"—"*whatsoever ye ask*"—"*what ye will*," "*in everything* let your request be made known to God." When Elisha in God's name called on the king of Israel to shoot the arrows of deliverance of the Lord's people from their enemies, the Syrians, the timid monarch smote thrice on the ground and stayed. The prophet was

angry that so important a moment should have been half lost by the want of largeness of heart on the part of the king (2 Kings xiii. 15, 19.) Yet this is what most of us are always doing—making mistakes as to how far the measure of the Divine goodness will reach. We hold out a trembling hand, and feel a palpitating heart, when we pray to our God. We feel we deserve nothing, and therefore we ask little, as if our own worthiness were the ground of our asking. If so, we should ask nothing at all, for we have no ground of that kind to stand on. Our natures are so selfish and so carnal that we cannot appreciate that riches of Divine goodness which is set before us in Christ, and so we ask timidly.

The good *Philip Henry*, after praying for two of his children who were dangerously ill, said, "If the Lord will be pleased to grant this my request, I will not say as the beggars do at our door, 'I will never ask anything of you again.' On the contrary, '*Thou shalt hear oftener from me than ever;* and I will love thee better as long as I shall live.'" It is said of *Alexander the Great* that on one occasion he gave permission to one of his favourites with his accustomed generosity to ask of him any gift he pleased. The person so favoured immediately named a large sum of money. The bystanders expected that a frown would instantly overspread the royal countenance. But in place of that the monarch smiled, and gave orders that it should be done as he desired. "*That friend*, he said, *honours me by the largeness of the amount which he asks.*" In a certain poem, a man is represented as timidly venturing into God's presence with a *little* draft, and God inquires why he did not ask a larger sum, knowing that He delighted to satisfy the longing soul, and would not send the hungry soul empty away. As He said of Jeremiah, so He says still, "*Call unto me, and I will shew thee great and mighty things.*"

The Armenian Christians, along with many gross fancies, yet believed in the great power of prayer. *St. Basil*, from his great sanctity, was credited with having an almost resistless power of prayer, so that he not only delivered souls from purgatory, but even lost angels from the abyss of hell. On the sixth day of the creation, when the lost angels fell from heaven through that opening which we call, "The Milky Way," one unlucky angel, who took no part in the rebellion, yet got entangled in the crowd, and fell with the rebels; nor was this unfortunate spirit restored until long afterwards. St. Basil, coming to understand his condition, made his case the subject of earnest pleadings, and at last was successful in effecting his rescue. His condition meantime, for about 5000 years, must have been very uncomfortable, like that of Klopstock's repentant demon in the Messiah.

"Man's plea to man is that he never more
Will beg, and that he never begged before;
Man's plea to God is, that he did obtain
A former suit, and therefore sues again.
How good a God we serve, that when we sue,
Makes His old gifts the examples of His new!"

4. Prayer is for the spiritual health of the soul. Prayer is the soul spreading its sails to catch the heavenly breeze which is to make it hasten on its voyage on the homeward bound course more rapidly. In prayer, *Paul* first draws the breath of spiritual life, and in prayer, *Stephen* breathes his spirit at the point of death into the arms of the Saviour. The praying Christian is the receiving Christian, and so becomes the prosperous Christian.

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day;
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

The good man will seek God's face for evermore. He will call upon Him as long as he lives. (Ps. cv. 4; cxvi. 2.)

It is His atmosphere which he breathes, without breathing which he must die. It is the ambient air that goes all round about him, in which he lives and moves and has his being. "There is a class of animals, neither fish nor sea-fowl, called the cetaceous, that inhabit the deep. It is their home; they never leave it for the shore; yet though swimming beneath its waves and sounding its darkest depths, they have ever and anon to rise to the surface that they may breathe the air. Without this they could not live. And similarly is it with the Christian. It is by ever and anon ascending to God, rising through prayer into a purer and loftier region for supplies of Divine grace, that he can preserve his spiritual health. Prevent these animals from rising to the surface, and they die for want of air; and prevent the Christian from rising to God in prayer, and he dies in like manner." [*Guthrie.*]

"*As the tender dew that falls in the silent night makes the grass and herbs, and flowers to furnish* and grow more abundantly than great showers of rain that fall in the day, so secret prayer will more abundantly cause the sweet herbs of grace and holiness to grow and flourish in the soul, than all those more open, public, and visible duties of religion, which too, too often are mingled and mixed with the sun and wind of pride and hypocrisy." [*Brooks.*]

The root that produces the beautiful and flourishing tree, with all its spreading branches, verdant leaves, and refreshing fruit—that which gains for it sap, life, vigour and fruitfulness, is all unseen; and the farther and deeper the roots spread beneath, the more the tree expands above. So the man who would flourish as a Christian, and bring forth the fruits of holiness must strike his roots wider and deeper in private prayer. Even the priests of Buddha teach that if men pray to Buddha, and do not become Buddha, it is because the mouth prays and not the mind."

"Prayer purifies: it is a self-preached sermon."

5. It reveals the true state of the heart. The barometer makes us acquainted with the actual state of the atmosphere; it takes cognisance of the slightest variation, and by its elevation or depression gives indication of every change at any given time. So the Christian has an index within him of the elevation or depression of his spirituality of mind, namely his spirit of devotion. As is the love for communion with God in prayer and meditation, so is the Christian life in the man.

"You may see the son of a prince one day in richer and more glorious apparel than on another day, but you will never find him in sordid, ragged, and beggarly clothes; he still is clad as becomes a king's son. And the Christian you may sometimes see come forth with more enlargement of affections in prayer and all his graces in high exercise, but you will never find him with his robe of grace altogether laid aside. The true saint will distinguish his birth by his everyday course, he will not altogether neglect spiritual duties. It is the brand of a hypocrite to have his devotion come by fits, and like a drift of snow to lie thick in one place and none in another—to seem to vie with the angels for zeal at one time, and live like an atheist for weeks after." [*Gurnall.*]

The exercise of prayer is so free of all difficulty, that it requires nothing but a proper state of heart to make it the easiest of duties. By every right-hearted person it ought to be hailed instinctively as the means of enriching the soul with marvellously little trouble. We are not required to ascend to heaven, nor take any long journey on earth; we have not to go through a long course of penitential service, to weep tears of blood, or to subject the body to stripes, lacerations and agonies; nor have we to grind in the prison-house for long years of hard servitude. We have but to come to God as a Father in the name of Christ, to tell Him in the spirit of little children all that is in our hearts, to express deep sorrow for our sins, and supplicate pardon and spiritual liberty for Christ's sake, to plead His promises and pour out our whole hearts for such blessings

as He declares Himself ready to bestow—and we shall find the gate of mercy open—the spiritual heavens open, and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ willing to pour down blessings till there be not room to receive.

"*Every time,*" says *Faber*, "*is suitable for the duty, every place and posture.* Talent is not needed; nor eloquence, nor dignity of rank. Thoughts are needed; actions too can pray, and sufferings can. There need be no ceremonies, and there are no rubrics to keep. The essence of the duty is the child at the Father's knee, penitent and trustful, earnest words and a still more wistful face."

6. **It leads to the fulfilment of the Divine promises.** Prayer is the key that opens the gate of Heaven's treasure-house. It is the child knocking at his father's door for food and drink. In such a case there is nothing more agreeable to the father's feelings than to open his hand and supply the wants of the suppliant. But in addition to natural willingness, there is in the case of all prayer offered in the name of Christ, all the encouragement which can be given by *promises* made, explicitly and decidedly by Him who cannot lie. Hence when the tree of the promise is shaken by the hand of prayer, we are assured that precious fruits more or less will fall into our hands. It has been said that "words in prayer are but as powder; faith is the kindled match, and the promise is the bullet that doeth the execution, while fervency gives great force to the discharge." He is an imprudent soldier who leaves the work of fitting his bullets to the bore of his pieces till he comes into the field; so he is an unwise petitioner at God's throne who does not provide promises suitable to his case, before he appears to present his request. Daniel and Jacob, and David with other wrestlers, seem all to have had their mouths filled with arguments, and especially with the promises of God, every time they visited the throne of grace.

What a power belongs to prayer when it is carried on with a skilful pleading of the Divine promises! The most honoured list of names in the sacred Book itself is distinguished by nothing more prominently than by the spirit of prayer, from Abraham and Jacob downward to Daniel and Nehemiah in the Old Testament, and from Zacharias and Elizabeth, down to the well-beloved Gaius and the praying ones in the seven churches of Asia Minor, in the New Testament. All the successes gained in the planting of the Christian church in Judea, Samaria, and over so vast a territory of heathendom in the Apostles' days, and those of their successors, as well as in every age of the thrilling history of time, were due to prayer. A praying church always moved the hand that controlled the storms, and could make all events work together for her good. But for prayer, the worst of the persecutors had not become the chief among the apostles, and one of the most profligate of youths had not been raised up to lay the foundation of the church's sacred system of faith, and to shine as a star of the first magnitude in one of the darkest nights of her strange history. The mighty Luthers were what they were because of their prayers. The prayers of defenceless Knox were more feared by the persecuting Queen, than an army of ten thousand men. Whitefield and Wesley gave another and fresher colour to the religion of England by means of their prayers. Through the prayers of Finney, Edwards, and many others, what a beneficial influence was brought to bear in the formation of the religious character of the young giant nation of the Western world! And how many individual great men, who have been burning and shining lights in their day, were converted in answer to fervent and united prayer! And still it is this same power which has done so much to bless the church and the world in the past, to which we are to look for bright days, and glorious triumphs for the future. It has been the motto in the past, and still will be in the days to come. "Prayer and pains can do any thing."

7. It cultivates a spirit of dependence on God. No posture is more humble than that of prayer; none more impresses on the creature a sense of his own emptiness, or on the sinner a sense of his own unworthiness. Gratitude is also taught, and hope, notwithstanding of our guilt. But especially the feeling of dependence on a mightier arm than our own, and a heart truer in love is deeply impressed on all who bend the knee at the Divine footstool.

8. It strengthens for great duties and for severe trials. It is after being long on the Mount with God that the face shines with an unearthly brilliancy like that of Moses, and the hands become strong to fight against any odds, as in the case of Joshua, of Elijah, or of David. Through prayer, the weak learn to become as David, and David becomes as an angel of the Lord. Through prayer, we make peace with the powers of the world to come, we conquer death, obtain an Advocate and propitiation in judgment, and acceptance and a verdict of "Well-done," from the Great Judge at last. The whole sky of the future becomes cleared, every cloud is dispelled, and a transporting vision of life and glory through the long vista of our immortality is assured without fail to those who place their trust in the Saviour.

These great and awful fears respecting our eternal state being removed, the dangers and trials of time lose all their really formidable aspect (Rom. viii. 18). Deliverance from the greater trials includes deliverance from the less. Prayer is indeed the wall that surrounds the Christian, wherever his lot is cast in this world of distance and of darkness. No evil can befal him, no plague can come nigh, but instantly, swifter even than the working of the telegraphic wire, he can communicate with the Supreme Governor over all things, and darkness shall become light, weakness shall become strength, and trouble shall be changed into peace.

The believer has a claim in prayer. "All the promises in the Bible are so many bills of exchange drawn by God the Father in Heaven upon His Son Jesus Christ, and payable to every pious bearer—to everyone that comes to the mercy-seat, and offers the promise or bill for acceptance, and pleads in the way of obedient faith and prayer. Jesus the High Treasurer of Heaven knows every letter of His Father's handwriting, and can never be imposed upon by any forged note. He will ever honour His Father's bills; He accepts them all. It is for His Father's honour that His bills never fail of acceptance and payment." [*Beaumont.*]

Prayer elevates as well as strengthens. "Constantine the Great was one day looking at some statues of noted persons who were represented *standing.* 'I shall have mine taken *kneeling,*' said he, 'for that is how I have risen to eminence.' Thus it is with the Christian; if he would obtain any real eminence in the Christian life, he must be often kneeling in prayer to God."

It is a mistake to suppose that good men will get anything they choose to ask for. God will not give what is hurtful, what would feed vanity or pride, or worldliness. He will not give the fish they ask, when it would turn out a serpent. He gives the bitter now, that the sweet may come by and bye.

IV. Hindrances to prayer.

1. An unsuitable frame of mind.

This may arise from various causes:—

(1.) *Place* may have to do with it. Where there is bustle or excitement it is hard to give that close attention and profound homage of the heart which is essential in transacting business with our God. When Peter wished to do the work of penitence, "*he went out.*" In the court-room, and in the midst of enemies, he could not pour out the feeling of a full heart without molestation. The Master has said, "when thou prayest, *enter into thy closet.*" We read of some who prayed on "*the house-top*"—which among the Jews was one of the best places of retirement. We hear also of other spots used for the sacred purpose of prayer—"*the little chamber*" (II. Kings iv. 10); "*the upper room*"

(Acts i. 13); *"the inner chamber"* (I. Kings xx. 30; xxii. 25). But any place which is private, or free of that which may distract the attention, is suitable. *"The desert place, the mountain side,* or *in the presence of the disciples,"* were the places chosen by Jesus himself. Nicodemus chose the friendly shelter of *"the fig-tree."* Ezekiel *"went forth into the plain."* (Ezek. iii. 22). Jeremiah prayed in *"the dungeon."* David, *"in the wilderness depths."* Jonah, from *"the bottom of the mountains." Daniel, from a chosen "chamber in his own house, with the windows open towards Jerusalem."*

Wherever the soul may find composure, and be free of all disturbing influences, there is suitableness of place. A man cannot concentrate his thoughts amid a gabble of tongues, or where a multitude of intruders come in to divide the attention.

(2.) *Irritation of feeling* may have to do with it. Where anger or wrath, or other passions are excited, and a man's spirit becomes ruffled, heavenly work like that of prayer cannot go on. The Spirit of God has for His emblem *"the dove."* He flies from the abodes of strife and clamour, of envyings, hatred, and variance. Elisha's spirit was roused to a high pitch of righteous anger at the presence of the idolatrous King of Israel, Ahab's wicked son, when he came to him for aid merely out of courtesy to Jehoshaphat, King of Judah. So great was his perturbation of spirit (II. Kings iii. 13, 14), that he felt himself in an unsuitable frame for the Spirit of God to rest upon him; and he sought the soothing influence of music to bring down his mind to that calm and placid temper which was necessary to fit him for being also a suitable medium for receiving the Divine afflatus (ver. 15). When the soul is tranquil, like the canvas before the painter, it is ready to receive whatever may be depicted thereupon. "The still and quiet soul is like a ship that lies quiet in the harbour; you may take in what goods you please. But it is very difficult to put cargo on board ship in a rough sea. So the soul must lie quiet under God's hand, in order to get into it much of God, of Christ, or of the spirit of prayer. [*Brooks.*]

Jeremy Taylor says, "Prayer is the issue of untroubled thoughts; it is the daughter of charity, and the sister of meekness; to pray with a discomposed spirit is like retiring into a battle to meditate. Anger prevents prayer rising up in a right line to God. He compares the case to the lark rising from its bed of grass, soaring upwards, singing as it rises, and hoping soon to get above the clouds; but the poor bird is beaten back by the loud sighings of an eastern wind, its motions become irregular, and it descends more at every breath of the tempest, than it can recover by the frequent balancing of its wings. At last the little creature is forced to sit down and pant, and to wait till the storm is over; then it rises joyfully and sings as if it had learned music from an angel, and passes through the air to regions out of sight. So the good man must wait till his spirit is free of all ruffle, is calm as the brow of Jesus and smooth like the heart of God. Then shall it ascend to heaven upon the wings of the holy Dove, and return like the useful bee, laden with a blessing, and with the dew of heaven."

(3.) *Want of sympathy with the exercise.* How often is the devotional spirit lacking! The heart feels dull and leaden in its frame when the call comes to address the throne of grace. Yet if the heart be cold, prayer is a more likely means to warm it than to omit prayer. We must come to the fire before we get warm. As Baxter remarks, "God's Spirit is more likely to help you in duty, than in the neglect of it." But cold prayers are a sacrifice without fire. The true method is to cultivate spirituality of mind as a rule—to "walk in the Spirit," *i.e.*, to be habitually spiritually-minded—

"When prayer delights the least then learn to say,
Soul, now is greatest need that thou shouldst pray.
Oh, come, warm sun, and ripen my late fruits.
Pierce, genial showers, down to my parched roots."

We must by all means get into the spirit of prayer, for without delight in it, prayer will make a harsh sound. "Delight is the marrow of religion." "*With joy we are to draw water out of the wells of salvation.*" To refer to a sentiment already quoted, "Faith is the bucket, but joy and love are the hands that move it. God does not value that man's service who accounts not His service a privilege and a pleasure." "The arrow which is shot from the bow with a loose cord drops powerless to the ground." It is not the vapid utterance of a dull leaden heart that has power with God and prevails, but the strong Jacob-like cry which will take no denial till the blessing come.

(4.) *Wandering thoughts.* These must be called in, and the whole attention given to the subject in hand. The petitioner must be able to say, "My heart is fixed; O God, unto Thee will I sing, and unto Thee will I pray." All other things must retire, and be shut out while the soul is in audience with its God. Never should the thoughts be more collected. Newton, who complained occasionally of wandering thoughts, said of his case, "I compare myself to the case of a man on his knees before the king pleading for some great favour; in the midst of his petitioning, he sees a butterfly fluttering before him, he immediately breaks off, and runs to catch the butterfly. Such a man is thought mad; and alas! my thoughts prove, that I am not free from spiritual insanity."

2. Want of premeditation. We ought to have a *definite object to pray for.* "Be not rash with thy mouth and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God." Where there is no well-defined object to be gained present to the thoughts, there can be no sincere wish for it in the heart, and therefore no real prayer. It is so great a privilege to be allowed to come at any time, and at all times, to the Fountain-head of blessing, with the assurance of acceptance, that one should always make sure of not returning empty-handed; but to do that there must be definiteness of object, and earnestness of manner. We must consider.

"Meditation is prayer's handmaid to wait on it, both before and after the performance. It is as the plough before the sower to prepare the heart for the duty of prayer, and the harrow to cover the seed when it has been sown. As the hopper feeds the mill with grist, so does meditation supply the heart with matter for prayer. Before the tradesman goes to the fair, he looks over his shop that he may know what commodity he most lacks. So, ere we engage in prayer, we should be careful to ascertain the graces and mercies we most need. Also our heart is like a watch that is soon run down, and needs constant winding up. It is an instrument put easily out of tune. Meditation tunes the instrument, and sets it for the harmony of prayer. One great reason why our prayers want *success* is, that we do not meditate before them. We should be able to say with David, "*Give ear to my word, O Lord; consider my meditation.*" [*Gurnall.*]

God calls for our best and our utmost. We are to bring the choicest of the flock for an offering, and not to present a lame unconcocted, wandering discourse to God, when we might, with consideration, give something more accurate and exact. When a Roman gentleman invited Augustus Cæsar to supper, and provided him with a mean entertainment, Cæsar very properly took him up with the question, "Friend, how came you and I to be so familiar?" God will reject the sons of presumption and impertinance with disdain, and since they take no time for the making of their prayers, He will take long time before granting them." [*South.*]

"We often ramble in our prayers and get nothing, because, in fact, we desire nothing. We only chatter about a number of things, but the desires of the heart do not fix on any one thing. Imagine an archer shooting with his bow, and not knowing where the mark is. How could he succeed? Conceive a ship putting out to sea, without the captain having any idea in what direc-

tion he should steer! How foolish! Or suppose a man goes to the market to make purchases, but he has not thought beforehand what things he needs. So is it both unwise and irreverent to go into the presence of God, without being able to answer the question, "*What is thy petition, and what is thy request, and it shall be done unto thee.*" [*Spurgeon.*]

3. Sin wilfully cherished in the heart. In order to make thorough work of the religious services of his day, especially in regard to prayer, James, in his epistle, frequently calls on his readers :—"*Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; purify your hearts, ye double-minded.*" Only thus could they expect that God would draw nigh to them when they drew nigh to Him. Jeremiah also reproves the people of his day for "*dissembling in their hearts,*" when they asked him to pray unto God for them, and therefore their prayers should be heard in judgment, and not in mercy (Jer. xlii. 20-22). (See Ps. lxvi. 18; Isa. lix. 1, 2; Isa. i. 15, 16, etc.; James iv. 3; Job xxvii. 8, 9). We do not read that Elijah offered a single prayer for the return of the much needed showers of heaven to refresh the parched land until the people had publicly and unanimously repented of their sin of forsaking their own God and going after the worship of idols. But the moment they ceased to practise this sin, we find him at once on his knees, imploring with earnest wrestlings the reopening of the windows of heaven to refresh the burnt up fields and valleys of Israel. (1 Kings xviii. 42.) For three years and a half he ceased to pray for the land, while the people cherished their sin unrepented; now, he loses not an hour! To sin while we pray, is as if, while a house was on fire, we were to throw water on it with the one hand, and to cast fuel or oil upon it with the other. The fire will not be quenched. Unrepented sin, like a partition wall, prevents our prayers ascending before God. Guilt on the conscience is a great hindrance to prayer.

4. Cares and anxieties. These prevent the calm and firm exercise of faith, and so hinder prayer. Hence Phil. iv. 6, 7. It is not all at once that most people can compose their minds to a praying frame. When the sea has been agitated all day with the wind, it does not become calm and placid the very moment that a lull comes on. So a man's mind, which has been full of cares all the day over, will still for a time feel in the midst of bustle, after he retires to his chamber. Gurnall remarks, that "it is hard to converse with the world all day, and then shake it off at night, in order to enjoy privacy with God. The world does by the Christian, as the little child by the mother. If it cannot keep the mother from going out, then it will cry to be taken with her. If the world cannot keep us from going to religious duties, then it will cry to be taken along with us, and there will be much ado to part between it and the affections." If our prayers would ascend like a pillar of incense from the altar, there must be a holy calm on the spirit, and the boisterous winds of inordinate cares about the world must be laid.

5. Praying without the Spirit. "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be altered" (Jude 20; Rom. viii. 15; Gal. iv. 6; Eph. ii. 18; vi. 18). He is called "the Spirit of supplication" (Zech. xii. 10). All spiritual strength is from Him (Eph. iii. 16).

"We need the help of God's Spirit to fix our minds, and make them intent and serious in prayer. The ship without a pilot rather floats than sails. That our thoughts do not float up and down in prayer, we need the blessed Spirit to be our pilot to steer us. A shaking hand may as well write a line steadily, as we can keep our hearts fixed in prayer without the Spirit of God." [*Watson.*]

"As the sails of a ship carry it into the harbour, so prayer carries us to the throne and bosom of God. But as the

sails cannot of themselves speed the progress of a vessel unless filled with a favorable breeze, so the Holy Spirit must breathe on our hearts, or our prayers will be motionless and lifeless." [*Toplady.*]

"There must be life in the soul before there can be life in the duty. All the rugs in the store will not fetch a dead man to warmth; nor will any arguments, though most moving in themselves, make thee pray fervently while thy soul lies in a dead state. Go first to Christ, that through His Spirit thou mayest have life; and, having life, there is then some hope to chafe thee into some heat. Prayers offered without the Spirit are but smoke before God, offensive to His pure eyes, instead of incense and a sweet savour." [*Gurnall.*]

V. Suitable subjects of prayer.

1. The widest range is allowed. The statute-book gives this liberty. The God who began by giving us His Son will now stop nowhere. So far as disposition to give is concerned, there cannot now be any holding back. In giving His Son, He has pitched the scale of benevolence so high that nothing can remain ungiven. If we only devote ourselves to Christ, and keep constantly to Him as our portion, we may "*ask what we will* and it shall be done." Christ refuses nothing to thorough friends. "*Whatsoever ye shall ask* in my name, that will I do," etc. "If ye *ask anything* in my name, I will do it." We come as children to a father, and what good thing will the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ deny to children whom He loves so well—who are all so dear to Him through the sprinkled blood! Also we come to a "throne of *grace*"—not a throne of *justice*—of *power* or *majesty*—high and lifted up, where we could use only stuttering and stammering speech—but a throne before which sin is forgiven—a throne of grace, to which we are called to "come boldly."

Hence the language so worthy of Him who is "rich in mercy,"—"ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find," etc. etc. "Buy, without price!"—"let your soul delight itself in fatness!"—"ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

Our expectations cannot rise too high—to meet all our needs, desires, longings and aspirations; to have fears dissipated, sins pardoned, and peace with God established; to get deliverance from dangers, help under burdens, light in darkness, strength in weakness, and comfort in sorrow; all that can bless the soul for the present, and spread the bow of hope for it in the future. "*My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus.*" "*God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye always, having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.*"

Southey puts in the foreground four subjects for prayer:—

> Four things which are not in thy treasury,
> I lay before thee, Lord, with this petition;
> My nothingness, my wants,
> My sins, and my contrition.

2. Nothing is too little to ask from God. Nothing is too little for Him to attend to. He provides the bee with its food; the gnat and the moth are fed from His hand; He cares for the worm, the insect, and the animalcule. Nothing which it seemed good for Him to create is beneath His care.

Nor is anything too small for us to ask. Any want, however small, we may name before Him if its supply would be to us a relief. Any desire, however trifling it may seem to others, we may express before Him, if to grant it would be to us a material good. That may be of consequence to a boy which would be trivial to his father. That may be a godsend to one weak in the faith, which is regarded as mere puerility or simplicity by one well established. Little and great, indeed, are relative terms. It depends on the scale by which we measure. What is life and death to us, is very small before God. Nay, all His creatures with all their interests, as compared with Himself, are "less than nothing and vanity." And all are

before Him at the same level of insignificance, so that if He should attend to the wants of the mightiest angel around His throne, He may also be expected to attend to the necessities of the meanest of us all.

Things which are distressing to us seem to Him no more than the breaking of a toy to a child; yet as the father of that child does not judge of the importance of the event by the aspect it bears to him, but regards it entirely as it affects the child, and begins to soothe the distress of the little one, and tenderly wipe away his tears, so does God act as our Heavenly Father when an event may happen which proves very afflictive to the feelings of any of His children. He does not sit above the clouds as the heathen thought their gods sat, wrapped in the selfishness of His superiority, and despising the littleness of the creatures that crawl below. "He knoweth our frame." "He understandeth our thoughts." "He tells the number of the stars. He also healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds." And there is nothing which is a source of pain or uneasiness, of doubt or difficulty, of grief or anguish to any of His children, which He is not only willing to hear, but is desirous that they should tell Him.

3. All that He has promised we may ask. Here every step is sure. God cannot take back His own word; He cannot fail to fulfil it. "Heaven and earth may pass away, His word shall not." "The strength of Israel will not lie." But one thing must always be kept in view, it is only through Christ as Mediator that any promise can be answered consistently with God's holy and righteous character. Every promise we plead in His name we can plead with the greatest confidence. "*In Him all the promises of God are yea, and in Him, Amen, to the glory of God.*"

To plead God's faithfulness to His own word is the mightiest of all the arguments we can use at the throne of grace. "My faithfulness will I establish in the heavens"—in the most conspicuous and public manner, because it is so essential to the glory of His name. Even when His people prove treacherous, and violate their engagements to Him, though He may severely chastise them, He still declares: "*I will not suffer my faithfulness to fail; my covenant I will not break, nor alter the thing that has gone out of my lips.*" The secret of Jacob's mighty power with God lay entirely in the short utterance: "*Thou saidst.*" The precious promise made at Bethel, Jacob had kept in his breast as a treasure too rich to be parted with. For the long period of 20 years he kept that treasure locked up in his bosom, as a thing not to be given for gold nor any amount of precious silver. God loved him for it; and, in His Providence, brought round an occasion to bring to light the excellent character of the man who sets a high value on His promises. When that occasion arrived, Jacob showed the fast hold he had of the girdle of the Divine faithfulness, when he would take no denial, because it was for God's own honour that His word should not fail. And as he so highly honoured God, God also greatly honoured him, by giving him "exceeding abundantly above all that he asked or thought." This, too, was the secret of Moses' power in prayer, when he wrought so mightily that God said to him: "*Let me alone*"—implying that if Moses went on pleading God's promises, as he was doing, God must comply with his request. Joshua's argument was similar: "*What wilt Thou do unto Thy great Name?*" And Abraham's case is parallel: "*Wilt Thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?*" (Gen. xxxii. 12, with verse 26; Ex. xxxii. 10; Josh. vii. 9; Gen. xviii. 23). They are called "Sure mercies" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5; Isa. lv. 3).

Our duty then is to go to the promises daily and fill our mouths with arguments to be pled at the Divine footstool, according to the directions given: "*Take with you words and turn to the Lord.*" "Put me in remembrance: let us plead together,"

etc. "Come, let us reason together."

"God's promises are prizes in the hand of God to stimulate the soul's activities—more glorious than laurel wreaths, or the trumpeting of fame, or principalities and thrones. They are yielded by God only to an application of faculties, at the least, as intense and ardent as is put forth in pursuit of human ambition. God doth not cheapen His promises down to a glance at them with the eye, or a mouthing of them with the tongue; but he requireth of those who would have them an admiration equal to that of lovers, an estimation equal to that of royal diadems, and a pursuit equal to that of Olympic prizes." [*Irving*].

4. All such blessings as God has already given. This opens out another ground of pleading equally good with direct promises. Everything that God *does* is a promise in *deed* that He will do the same thing again in the same circumstances. For He is absolutely consistent with Himself, in all ages, and under all circumstances. He always shows that He is the same God; that He is "without variableness, or the shadow of turning." His rules in dealing with men never change. What He laid down as rules in the days of Abraham He lays down still, as the footing on which He acts in His intercourse with men. The circumstances may be widely different, and there may be expected a corresponding change in the manner of applying the rules. But there is no departure from the rules themselves in their substance and tenor. In that respect they are identically the same now as they were then, however different in aspect and in the manner of application they may seem. A few thousand years make not the slightest alteration on the character and government of the eternal and immutable Jehovah! It is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that is our God, though with the grand addition to His name—the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. But, though it was not then revealed, He was in reality the God of the gospel to the fathers, in His gracious dealings with them and the promises He made to them, the same as He is to believing men still. And we, on the other hand, are warranted to plead all His gracious acts done to them, and all the great and precious promises made to them, as equally done and made to us, and arguments for the same things being done and made *again and again*, in our blessed experience as we may have need of them.

Moses pled thus when he supplicated God to "pardon the people—as He had forgiven them from Egypt until now." (Num. xiv. 19). It is said, "He remembers His word to a thousand generations." (Ps. cv. 8). Which implies that the same word lives down all that time, and will be equally serviceable to any of the generations, as it was to the first. We have also the statement, "Thy memorial endureth throughout all generations." What God does in one age is a lesson for every age that follows, that He will show Himself the same God in the same or similar circumstances.

Can we point to special seasons in our personal history, when we had exceptionally severe trials to pass through, when the waters came in unto our soul, and our feet did sink in the mire; when friends stood aloof, and no man cared for our soul; when we cried to our covenant God "out of the depths," and He inclined His ear to our cry; when He brought us up out of the horrible pit and miry clay, and set our feet upon a rock and established our goings,"—then, no better argument could we use for all time to come, in the midst of great trials, than to call to remembrance those seasons and God's gracious dealings in connection with them, and go to the throne, with a Jacob-like confidence, and remind our Unchangeable Rock—"Lord, thou didst so much for me in the past; wilt thou not do again as thou hast already done? Would it not be like thyself so to act? Would it not be unworthy

of thee to even to seem to be different now from what thou wast then? Show that thou dost 'rest in thy love,' and that thou wilt 'continue thy loving kindness to them that know thee.'" Such must ever prove a successful ground on which to supplicate blessings at the throne of grace.

5. All that we know to be agreeable to His will. There may be many things that are of the nature of blessings of the Divine hand, that are not specially particularised in the Divine promises — especially those that relate to the details of daily life, and the lot of individual men. The promises are generally made to those who possess a certain character—the meek, the humble, those that fear, love, and obey God, the righteous, etc. This not only shows that "God is no respecter of persons," that He respects only characters, but also sets every man on inquiring whether he, for his part, possesses such features of character as are described in these promises. This is often a puzzling problem to solve, and it is often a great relief to get the auxiliary principle brought in, that all that is really agreeable to God's will must be held as suitable subject of prayer. Nay, we have a distinct intimation on the subject made, "If we ask anything according to His will He heareth us."

"No one thinks of praying that the sun may rise in the west instead of the east. Not because it is impossible with God, but long experience proves to us that it is not His will. No one thinks of praying that one who has just breathed his last may wake up to life once more; and for the same reason. Nor does anyone deem it right to pray that those who have advanced to extreme old age should be granted a new lease of life, and blush again into youth, and the blooms of early promise. When we see clearly what is the will of God, we feel we must submit to it without seeking to go against it." [*Roberts.*]

A faithful, prolonged, and intelligent study of the Word of God, where God reveals His character and will, is necessary in order both to be able to plead the promises aptly and skilfully, and also to judge accurately of what things would be agreeable to the Divine will. To pray that we may be at peace with God through the acceptance of Christ as our personal Saviour, that all our sins, however numerous and great, may be forgiven and forgotten, that we may get the victory over any evil principle or passion in the heart, that God may truly become our Father and God, that, in fact, we may individually come to have a share in all the spiritual blessings that are enjoyed by those who accept of Christ as their Saviour—we know to be agreeable to God's will, though our names are not given in the Bible. From God's nature we know it, for "He is love." Also from express general statements we know it. "He will have all men to be saved," etc. "He willeth not that any should perish." A multitude of texts prove it.

6. The best gifts we may most freely ask. To ask temporal blessings is allowable. Yet they occupy a greatly inferior place in the scale to those which are spiritual. There is but one petition, in the model prayer taught us by the Saviour, for temporal good things, but five references made to those which relate to spiritual blessings. The Saviour also expressly requires us to put the blessings of the kingdom in the foreground. "Seek first the kingdom of God," etc. It is also to be noticed that while temporal blessings are recognised as a suitable subject for prayer, the promise extends only to a very moderate degree of those blessings—"Daily bread," "bread and water" (Isa. xxxiii. 16); "food and raiment" (I. Tim. vi. 8); "to eat, drink, and be clothed" (Matt. vi. 31, 32); "to be fed" (Ps. xxxvii. 3). Manna only was given as wilderness provision, which was esteemed "light food" (Num. xi. 6, and xxi. 5). The

prayer of Agur is recorded as an example for us to copy, who, while wishing to be kept above poverty, does not covet riches (Prov. xxx. 8, 9). Solomon's choice is specially commended, who when left free to ask any good thing he might desire, put his finger on wisdom as better than rubies. God both gave him a wise and understanding heart, and added riches and honour (I. Kings iii. 9-13). Mary was specially approved of by her Lord in improving the occasion of His presence in her house by "sitting at His feet and listening to His word," rather than by busying herself with efforts to prepare Him a sumptuous table (Luke x. 38–42). Spiritual blessings are always to be greatly preferred to temporal, in our prayers. The latter, indeed, are only tolerated, or recognised as proper in their place, never to be coveted as a portion; while the latter are set forward as the great matter of prayer (Ps. iv. 6; xvi. 3, 5, 6; Prov. viii. 10, 11; I. Cor. xii. 31; John vi. 27; Ps. xvii. 13, 14; Habak. iii. 17, 18).

The choice of Peter is recorded to his everlasting honour (John vi. 68); and the choice of Moses (Heb. xi. 25, 26) has upon it the seal of an approving heaven. We must hold it to be wrong to pray for riches as such, not only because these as a rule become more or less of a temptation and a snare (I. Tim. vi. 9, 10), but because they are unsuitable as a portion for the soul, and their acquisition is discouraged in scripture. Should God confer upon us riches as well as spiritual blessings, they are to be regarded as merely *added* to the latter, which constitute the real gifts. And they are to be understood as not absolutely ours, but only given to us in stewardship. So David judged when he said, "Of Thine own have we given Thee" (I. Chron. xxix. 14, 16). For the supply of necessary wants, for the means of giving to everyone his due, or helping on the Lord's work, or for a proper competency for one's self and family circle, we may and ought to pray (I. Tim. v. 8; Rom. xiii. 8). What is necessary is promised (Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10, 22; xxxvii. 3).

7. All that would be for God's glory and for our good. Many miscellaneous subjects are ever coming up in daily life, in regard to which it will be felt more or less difficult to decide, whether they should be made matter of prayer to God or not. But there can be no doubt it is right, to bring every thing which we feel to be a difficulty to the throne of grace, and ask Divine direction (Jas. i. 5). Also, every thing which we feel to be a corroding care, or a burden of anxiety, we must refer to our God (Phil. iv. 6). But many things which are not expressly promised must be asked only in submission to the Divine will, and under the condition—*As far as it may be for God's glory and for our good.*

It is right to pray for recovery from sickness, whether in regard to ourselves, or in regard to any object near and dear to us, but God may have appointed the sickness to be unto death and the great Intercessor on High may be expressing it as His will before the throne, that the afflicted member of His body may be taken home to Himself to behold His glory. Therefore we should pray in submission to the Divine will. If some rough wind of adversity blows over us, and we find our fair prospects suddenly blighted, with cruel "Disappointment standing before us as our only Comforter" For a return of former prosperity we may supplicate, both as to the measure and manner, but only as it may seem meet to our Father in heaven. For the success of this or that project we have devised we may pray, or for the obtaining of some eligible situation in life, or for general success in business, and a comfortable through bearing in life, but always in the tone of saying—If it be for God's glory and for my good. Both of the one and the other of those things, God Himself must be the judge. For we are utterly incompetent to determine what is for God's glory, and even as to our own good, we oftentimes ask a stone for bread in

our ignorance, or we ask a serpent for a fish. And were God to answer our prayers, it would not prove a blessing but rather a curse. But our Heavenly Father's knowledge of what is best for us to have is always perfect, and His character is such that He never can decide otherwise than for our highest good, if we will only let Him have His own way.

VI. Answers to Prayer.

1. True prayer is certain to be answered. If prayer is both so glorifying to God, and so beneficial to ourselves, then it must be accepted. The form in which the answer is to be given may differ more or less in every different case, but that God will hear all genuine prayer and put it to our account is certain. He has given His word for it six times over in one sentence (Matt. vii. 7, 8). Cuyler says, "Answered prayers cover the field of Providential history as flowers cover western prairies." The whole Book of Psalms is a testimony to what God has done in answering prayer. It is not a doubtful matter whether we shall be listened to and answered in some manner when we pray aright. There are no exceptions in point of fact, whatever may seem to be the case to the petitioner himself. Though the heavens do not open, though no audible voice is heard, though no sign is given, it is as certain as any fixed law of nature that humble, penitent, believing prayer—the prayer of the "heart of flesh," is treasured up before God, and shall, without fail, be attended to in God's time and way. Not a single believing prayer is ever lost. The passage above quoted proves it. All the experience of God's people prove it. All the promises in the Bible on the subject of prayer prove it.

2. The answer is often delayed.

"Answering prayer does not always stand next door to petition; yet prayers are not forgotten by the faithful God. Even when we have forgotten them He remembers them. I stand in the rooms of my office, and wish to communicate with an official in the fifth story. I blow a whistle and talk through the tube. I know the message has got up there and that he has heard it. Yet I do not see him and he does not answer me back. I ask him to send down some papers, and after waiting for some time he answers me. So when we send up our prayer to God in heaven, we know He is there and knows about it. It is not for us to fret and worry about it, but leave the case in His hand, for He will do what is right ere long." [*Beecher.*]

"We shall have harvest after all, says the believer, in Gen. viii. 22. though the rains should fall and the prices rise, though the barometer should be low and the winds threaten to destroy the crop. And this we may safely say of the fruits of devout and earnest prayer. The answer may be long in coming, but in due time it will come. The seed often lies buried in the ground for months; but what is dormant is not dead. True prayers are not lost, they only bide their time, God's 'set time.' And when that time comes round, he who has sown in tears shall reap in joy. The God who puts His people's tears into His bottle will certainly not forget their prayers." [*Guthrie.*]

Many reasons may cause delay:—In general, any want in the right spirit of prayer, or, where that spirit exists, God may wait to convince us that we have no claim to the blessing, that it comes as a pure favour, and is given without being deserved; or, He may wait, because it becomes the majesty of His nature as God to proceed slowly and with deliberation in all His doings. Also, because one step of blessing is a precedent and a pledge of other steps. Also, because the present may not be the best time to give an answer. Or, because if the answer were given at once it might lead to presumption, and we might suppose we could command God's blessings at our own pleasure, and to try our faith in His character and word is always part of the reason for this waiting.

Gurnall says, "Prayers are not long on their journey to heaven, but long in coming back with a full answer. There is often a long and sharp winter between the time of sowing and that of reaping. Christ, at this day in heaven, hath not a full answer to some of those prayers which He put up on earth, for He is said to "*expect* till His enemies be made His footstool." The father reads his son's letter which has come from a distance; he likes his request, his heart closeth with it, and he resolves to grant it; but he takes his own time to send his despatch. Princes have their books or records wherein they put down the names of those whom they deem worthy of their favour, but they may stand for years without any honour being conferred. The name of Mordecai stood in Ahasuerus' book somewhile before his honour was given, and God records the names of His saints and their prayers in a degenerate age, but the reward is not given till the end come" (Mal. iii. 16-18).

3. We ought to look for an answer. To offer prayer to God, and not to follow it up by expecting an answer, is a certain indication either of insincerity in our petitions, or of unbelief as to God's promise to answer them. "Where the treasure is, there the heart will be." If the blessing sought be esteemed a treasure, the heart will certainly go out after it till it be gained. What shall we think of a subject, who has got the privilege of coming into the royal presence to present a petition, which he professes to regard as of the utmost importance to his interests? He offers his petition with becoming gravity of manner, but the moment he is done with the duty of presenting it, he turns his back on his sovereign, and walks out of the audience-chamber without waiting or caring to hear whether any reply be made or not! What is this but to mock royalty, and abuse the privilege of access to the fountain-head of power. Yet thus do we act towards God when we do not look after our prayers.

"To pray and not watch what becomes of our prayers is a great folly, and implies no little guilt. It is to take the name of God in vain, and trifle with an ordinance that is holy and sacred. It is like little children who knock at the door of some great house, and run away before it is opened, for their own amusement. When thou hast been with God, expect good to come from God, either at the moment, or some time after, or both. Enter His presence with the purpose, 'I will direct my prayer to thee, and will look up.' Your prayer will certainly receive no more attention from God if it is no longer attended to by you. If you do not believe, why pray? And if you do believe, why not expect? By not expecting you again renounce your confidence." [*Gurnall.*]

"People say, 'What a wonderful thing that God should hear George Müller's prayers!' Truly, we are come to a strange pass when we think it wonderful that God is true! It is indeed wonderful that God should make so many promises to us, but not wonderful that He should fulfil His word." [*Spurgeon.*]

We should not only look for an answer, but wait patiently for it, and pray again and yet again until the answer come. If the thing asked is promised by God, or is agreeable to His will, let us only persevere in looking for an answer. Elijah looked out seven times for the little cloud before it came; so should we look if it were seventy times seven rather than cease looking and expecting an answer. David went through the exercise of devotion before God with the greatest care. First he began with "meditations;" then followed petitions, humble, believing, fervent; next came "looking up;" and lastly came treasuring up in his book of remembrance. This is to do the business of prayer in a business manner. When we are asked to pray, we are bidden to "knock," which implies more than one call at the gate. And if we are not heard at once, let us knock, again and yet again for we know we are at the right gate.

Should there be no sound of any one approaching to open the gate we must continue to knock, for at last some one shall appear, and our waiting and anxious expectation shall not have been in vain.

4. Trust God for the time and manner of giving the answer. The circumstances are so numerous and so varied which must be considered in order to give a wise and even a kind answer, that our narrow minds are not competent duly to weigh them and come to a well-balanced judgment in the matter. It is therefore not the least proof of God's loving kindness and faithful care in watching over us that He should take the decision as to the *time* and *manner* of answering our prayers into His own hands. For He is not only thoroughly trustworthy, but He cannot in any case be misinformed, or make mistake on the one hand, and on the other hand it is His very nature to be just, compassionate, righteous, merciful and true, so that our interests are absolutely safe in His hands. He not only "will give grace and glory, but He cannot withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly." His heart will not allow Him to do less. "They that seek Him shall not want any good thing." His nature forbids Him to give less. Truly "blessed is the man that trusteth in Him."

As to the *manner* of the answer: God may give directly what is asked, or may give something better in its place, or may give support meantime while it is delayed, or may make the denial of it the means of an excellent discipline to the soul which is often the most profitable of all.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 4, 11.

IV. Deliverance again provided.

We must here call attention to the statement formerly made (p. 190), that while the *fact* of sin is told in a single sentence in this chapter, the *story of the deliverance from its consequences* is spread over the whole chapter. The Bible is a book written to give an account of one grand Redemption, and many smaller redemptions, which are emblems of the greater. Its spirit is not to depict elaborately the dark features of fallen human nature, and show how fully the race deserve to be destroyed; but rather to show how man has brought ruin on himself, and needs a great redemption. The final end kept in view is not destruction, but salvation. Hence at the opening of the Book, the account of man's falling into sin, his loss of the favour and the image of God; his expulsion from the society of the holy; and his exposure to all manner of evils from his falling under the Divine frown—all this is given in a single chapter (Gen. iii). Whereas the whole Bible otherwise is taken up with an account of the working out of the scheme of man's redemption. It is so easy to destroy; it is so difficult to restore. God delights so much to save; He is so loathe to consign to destruction.

Corresponding with this, it ought to be noted, that while the sins and backslidings of God's people, in this book of Judges, are faithfully narrated, and a true exhibition of their character is given, so that no one can mistake what is their own personal desert, the eye is yet not allowed to rest long on a delineation of details of their wickedness, but full scope is given to the pen of the sacred writer when it is employed to describe the interposition of Divine mercy, Almighty power, and marvellous wisdom, in the accomplishment of their deliverance. The glory of God manifested in the repeated redemption of an exceedingly sinful people, from the consequences of their sins, is the spirit of this book of Judges.

In noticing the account of the deliverance here narrated, we find:—

1. God was the author of this deliverance. The thought arose with Him. The nation had become so sunk, not only in ungodliness, but in all that was noble and manly, that no one was found of sufficient force of character to attempt to act the part of a liberator. As on all other occasions, God Himself originated the means of deliverance for His people. Though He had already three times delivered them (if we count chap. iii. 31, as one), from national ruin, while now for at least 160 years they had provoked Him to anger with their idolatrous tendencies, yet, full of pity, He rises up for their help, exclaiming, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?" It was for the glory of His own great name in the world that He should preserve their existence as a nation. They owed their existence to a gracious purpose which God was to fulfil through their instrumentality; but should their name as a nation be blotted out, that purpose must fail of accomplishment. Another nation might have been created to supply their place; but still it would have been said that God's original purpose in bringing this people into existence had failed. And it must not be whispered in heaven above or on the earth beneath that any plan of the Divine Wisdom and Love had proved abortive. Hence we find this people always spared in some manner, that no shadow might rest on Jehovah's name. "For mine own name's sake will I defer mine anger." (Isa. xlviii. 9-11.) Besides, the history of this people stood as a whole. Only a part of it had yet run. A glorious display of the divine perfection had already been made in connection with that history, much more of which had yet to run. It was of the highest consequence therefore for the glory of the Divine name that this people, notwithstanding the heinous character of their sins, should be preserved, and that it should be seen how radically different was the character of their God from the dumb idols of the heathen around them. To show forth anew God's glory was the great purpose to be gained in the deliverance now to be effected.

That the idea of a hostile movement against Sisera was of God himself, appears from the statement in ver. 6, where Deborah speaks as one commissioned by Jehovah to be an organ for the communication of His will to men. All the directions, also, as to what should be done, who were to do it, and how it was to be done, were given by God through the prophetess. His honour and glory were the ends to be gained; His hand, therefore, must be seen in all. Not only in the general scheme of Providence, but also in the history of every individual nation, and individual man it is true, that "of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things."

2. The hopeless character of Israel's prospects. Not only had truth fallen in the streets, but its form was scarcely anywhere seen in the land. Only a few glimmering lights appeared like torches, while darkness was in all the dwellings of Israel. Not only the race of heroes, but that of the men of God had died out. No prophet seemed to be at work from North to South; and the sole possessor of the heavenly gift in all Israel was a woman whom God had chosen. All had become craven hearted, abject and weak. The nation had lost its manhood, and had again become a herd of slaves. They were now learning in their miserable plight, what an "evil and bitter thing it was for them to have forsaken the Lord their God;" for now, He, their Rock, had sold them—their God had shut them up. *There was no sword nor spear in Israel.* There was no leader. There were no resources. There was no courage. There was no rallying point. Everything forbade the possibility of anything being done. On all sides there was prostration. It was the doing of sin; which is ever the reproach of any people. If an army could be raised in Israel, how could it make head against the nine hundred chariots of iron of the enemy; which, in all the ages of antiquity, were reckoned an irresistible force? There was also the large general army of

the enemy to be reckoned with; there was their renowned captain, who was a host in himself; and there was the demoralised condition of the whole people of Israel.

Who should come to the help of the Lord against the mighty in such an evil day? "Jehovah looked and there was none to help; He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation." "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." It is part of His wonder-working wisdom to turn the wickedness of man into the means of praising Him. The weakness to which his people had been reduced through their wickedness furnished the occasion for a more illustrious display of His glory as their Saviour God, than could have been made in an ordinary condition of things.

3. Suitable instruments are found when required to do God's work. Yet though the energies of the nation were paralysed, and the mainspring of its activities was broken; though its princes had become as harts fleeing before the pursuer, and all its men of heroism had disappeared from the land; though the Joshuas and Calebs, and Othniels were no longer to be found, while the people had become fewer in number, spent their days in terror, and were thoroughly crushed in spirit—within a few days, perhaps within one short week, when God was raised up by the voice of their penitence and their prayers, *agents were found to take the lead* to set a machinery in motion, and carry out a plan suitable to meet the emergency that had arisen. Man in such a case fails to find the fitting materials. God is at no loss. Jesus knew in a moment where to find the fish, which had a piece of money in its mouth, that was needed to meet a just claim which had occurred in the ordinary relations of life; and now though the land of Israel was stripped bare of resources as the barren wilderness, God knew at once where instruments were to be found suitable for carrying out His purpose. All hearts are in His hand, and all events are at His disposal. No time is needed to institute a search for the fit persons. In a moment He points with the finger to the persons whom He shall employ to execute His will.

To our thinking the individuals thus singled out may seem to be in several respects most unqualified to occupy the position to which God calls them. Yet thereby are they all the better qualified for bringing praise and honour to the Divine arm and the Divine wisdom, in the successful issue of the means employed. "God chooses the foolish things to confound the wise, and weak things to overcome things that are mighty; yea the base things, and such as are despised, He employs to bring to nothing things that are—that no flesh should glory in His presence." Who could have supposed that two women would have been put in the foreground to meet this most serious juncture in Israel's history—the one to act as the head, and the other as the hand, in vanquishing and even in annihilating the formidable power that had ground Israel to the dust for twenty years! Had a Joshua been raised up to act as leader, then the glory might have been ascribed to the great captain that led Israel's armies. But when a Deborah and a Jael are employed to do the work, then is it all the more conspicuous, that the hand of the Lord had brought about the result.

In congregations of Christian people there may sometimes be few persons, or almost none who have the gifts to act as leaders, by whom the Church's work may be carried on. *In communities*, sometimes scarcely a man can be found to come to the front, who possesses education, tact, firmness, or natural ability sufficient to act the part of a public leader. *In a great religious crisis* when the interests of Christ's truth, or the spiritual welfare of thousands, may be alarmingly at stake, few or none may appear possessing all the qualifications to take the helm, and conduct the vessel safely away from the breakers and bring it into port. But in such a case the course is clear. Let "the Lord's remembrancers" put the case into the hands of Him who can "make the weak become as David,"

and who now wrought with the Deborahs and the Baraks as mightily, as He did with the Samsons and the Jephthahs. No matter what may be the instruments employed, if the Lord's hand is at work, the Church will always be able to say, "We lack nothing."

4. Fit means must be employed along with Divine power. *God never despises the use of means* in bringing about certain results, because it is the arrangement He Himself has established through all nature, that certain means should be employed to produce certain effects. When Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man, "He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, with which He anointed his eyes." Not that the spittle had any efficacy, but He would show His regard to the use of some means, rather than work without means at all; and that He could make use of any means, however unlikely, to serve His purpose successfully. So now, though God could have easily overthrown Sisera and his army by miracle, by pestilence, by an earthquake, by the lightnings of heaven, by paralysing the muscular power of every soldier in the enemy's camp, or in many other ways, et he chooses to employ natural means for the purpose. He gives orders that an army be raised, and appoints a suitable leader. He requires that army to e gage in battle with the enemy, and gives the assurance that, through their instrumentality, He will overthrow Sisera, and utterly destroy his host.

The army was limited by God to 10,000 *men*, lest, as in Gideon's case, if a larger number had been chosen, Israel might have said, "Mine own hand hath saved me." It was extremely inadequate when looked at in the light of the terrible opposition it had to meet. The number of Sisera's army is not given; but judging by the whole account given it seems to have been an overwhelming force. The proposition might be similar to the force of Israel in the days of Ahab, as compared with the huge host of Benhadad—"like two little flocks of kids, while the Syrians filled the country." As the men of this small army came chiefly from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, it is supposed that, as Hazor, Jabin's royal city, lies in the territory of the former of these tribes, and as it is likely that it was at Hazor, or near it, where the chariots of iron were made, Barak's army was largely made up of the smiths or workers in iron, his vassals who actually made these chariots of iron, or along with these the wood-cutters, armed with their axes and hatchets, who were employed in large numbers in that great timber-growing district. If so, what a retribution on the head of the oppressor! Another supposition is, that as in Elijah's day, *the number of these who had not bowed the knee to Baal* was 7000, so in the days before Deborah arose, the number of this class in Northern Israel was 10,000—a supposition not so fanciful as at first might seem, for the battle was fought on religious grounds. "They came to the help of the Lord against the mighty," and "they jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field." The glory of the God of Israel was the chief thing concerned in the fighting of this battle, and that, every man who was there, or who stayed away, seemed to understand.

Here then was an army of fearers of the God of Jacob, who had not gone after other gods, men whose religious principles were put to the test, and they nobly stood the test. Can we wonder if God Himself should go forth before them, if He should "teach their hands to war and their fingers to fight," and if, thus succoured, the stout hearted should be spoiled before them, and none of the men of might should find their hands.

5. A strong faith and its reward. This we find in Deborah. She was the centre of interest, and the spring of all active movement throughout this teresting episode of history. All Israel looked to her for counsel. She was the nation's oracle. We hear nothing of high priest or seer in this degenerate

day—only Deborah. She was prophet, priest, and king. Without her Barak was nothing, and could do nothing. She was the one hope of Israel. That star put out, the whole sky would have been hopelessly dark. But for this one woman, the history of this sorrowful period would have been far more dismal still. Through her the turning-point was made to a happier and brighter era.

All this she was because of her faith. She had indeed the gift of prophecy, and performed the function of a judge, for she was appealed to in that capacity from all parts of the land. But that which determined her character was her faith in the God of Israel. She believed in His name; in His character; in His covenant with His people; and in His promises. She believed that the God of Jacob was with Jacob's seed, that "the Strength of Israel would not lie," that God would not forsake His people, but would in due time return and send relief to them under their manifold sorrows.

This faith, though *that only of a single individual,* was most refreshing in times when all things looked so dull and dreary. It revived the drooping spirits of the nation. If there was but one rose in the desert, its sweet perfume seemed to be wafted to every home in the land. When a man thought of Deborah he thanked God and took courage. This was most honouring to God—to see faith burning so strong in one bosom when it seemed to be so sickly and languishing everywhere else. When she announced the message of her God to Barak, she spoke with the utmost certainty of success. No faltering of tone, and no hesitation of manner. Doubt and fear were cast to the winds, while every word was spoken and every step was taken in the assurance of victory.

And what is *the reward of such faith* in a degenerate time? Every step succeeds of the directions which she gave. Barak's scruples are overcome; the 10,000 men assemble at Mount Tabor; Sisera's army are drawn together to the River Kishon; Jehovah specially interposes on behalf of Israel, and the enemy are destroyed beyond remedy. The praises of the God of Israel are again sung, and the fear of His name spreads abroad to every land. Another bright chapter is added to the history of Israel, and Deborah's name shall be known as that of a "mother in Israel" to all generations. How many in after years would rise up to call her blessed! Her name is immortalised as a "saviour" of the Church of God in an evil day, and that name shall shine as a star in the firmament through every age to the end of time. Nor shall it be lost sight of when the stream is swallowed up in the shoreless ocean beyond. For, from the wreck of time all God's jewels shall be carefully gathered, and made up in a glorious wreath to adorn the Redeemer's head through everlasting ages. Nothing that has been done for the church of God shall be forgotten. All who have been "faithful unto death shall receive the crown of life."

6. A weak faith and its chastisement. *Barak looked on the same picture as Deborah did, but (at first) with very different eyes.* He started back when he saw what seemed to be hobgoblins, satyrs, dragons, and all manner of hideous spectres; while she exulted at the thought that "the angel of the covenant" encamped round about His people, covering them with His feathers, and giving them all needful shelter under His protecting wing. *Weak faith* saw in the near foreground the dark thunder-cloud, surcharged with the elements of ruin, and hanging ready to burst over the homes of the once beloved, but now deserted people. *Strong faith* saw a mighty wind sent out from the Lord, dispersing the murky clouds, clearing the whole sky of danger, and opening out a period of glorious sunshine to succeed the period of gloom and sorrow. *Weak faith* saw the billows too mighty for the little skiff they carried on their bosom, and fearing it might founder at any moment, began to call for aid. *Strong faith* saw that skiff under the care of Him who walks on the waters, and commands every wave by a word, who controls every breath of wind, and has

pledged Himself to bring all safe in due time to land. *Weak Barak-like faith* sees the enemy stretching out his lines in deadly array, believes in the faintest possibility of its own success, and the high probability of crushing defeat with its frightful consequences. *Strong faith* says: "Who are these uncircumcised that they should defy the armies of the living God? These Canaanites "are men and not God, and their chariot horses flesh and not spirit." "Far more are with us than all that are against us." Once more *weak faith* says: We have no might against this great company that come against us, we are as grasshoppers before them, while they are a vast multitude, well-disciplined by the best of generals, and highly accoutred in arms. *Strong faith* says: "Though they compass us about as bees, they shall be quenched as the fire of thorns, for in the name of the Lord we will destroy them." It sees the finger of Omnipotence about to be put forth, and victory sure, swift, and overwhelming over the foe secured for the Church of God.

Barak's faith, *though at first weak, was genuine.* It seemed to be in part the weakness of surprise. He was taken aback, when told that he was chosen to occupy the perilous and difficult position of being captain over God's people; and he felt his insufficiency for the duties of the situation. But weak faith is yet true faith; as a drop of water is water as well as the ocean, or a spark of fire is fire as well as a large flame. The little finger lives the same life that the hand or foot does. A little grace may be true grace, as the filings of gold are as good gold (though little of it) as a whole wedge. Though the pearl of faith be small it shines with great beauty in God's eye; it is a ray of His own excellence. As yet Barak could only say: "Lord I believe! help thou mine unbelief!" If he were helped by Deborah, he was prepared to undertake the arduous duty. That indicated true faith. He knew that the Lord was with the prophetess, but he did not as yet feel that the Lord was in any special sense with himself. Had he shown a firm faith and at once said, without any hesitation: Here am I! Send me! Very likely the next sentence we should have read would have been: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him." This is the first chastisement of his weak faith—the lack of the double portion of the Divine Spirit. That he had the Spirit was manifest, but it was not given in such large degree apparently, as in the case of some others of the judges.

His faith seems to have grown stronger every hour while Deborah was with him; and at last we see him boldly taking the initiative in going forth to encounter the mighty host of Sisera in battle array. And because, when the time came, he rose with the occasion, and performed the great feat of that day by faith and not by sight, therefore his name finds a place in the honourable list of the men of faith. Thus in the end his faith obtained a great reward, though the crowning laurels were denied to it, because it staggered at the beginning. While Sisera lived the enemy lived. His destruction was the putting an end to the oppression of the people of God, and the signal for their immediate emancipation. This honour was withheld from Barak and conferred on a woman. And thus more especially was his weak faith chastised. Zacharias was struck dumb for his unbelief; and Moses had the scar of Meribah left on him till the last. But the blessed thing is to have true faith at all. Even when small as the acorn it is able to move mountains of difficulty. And if only living, however small, it will grow. Under proper cultivation it may become powerful as the cedar, and be able to use the noble language, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

7. God's ordering the battle, a presage of victory. The thought of having a battle at all was God's own. It was the natural way of getting out of the hands of the oppressor. Though war in itself is a thing to be deprecated, it sometimes becomes a necessity; and as a matter of fact, God sometimes takes that way of

punishing the oppressor. It was so now. In verse 6 we are told that the God of Israel gave the command to raise an army and go out to battle against the Canaanites. This command was the first step. The second lay in appointing Barak to be the leader of the army of Israel; as is implied in the same charge. Another step commanded was to make the number of combatants as few or as many as 10,000. Still another step was that God Himself would draw forth Sisera to engage in battle, with his full force assembled. And lastly, a promise is added, "I will deliver the enemy into thine hand."

The Lord is a rock; His work is perfect. *When He begins, He carries through.* If He stir up a spirit of prayer in a man for some special blessing, the pouring out of that spirit is itself evidence enough that He means to bestow the blessing. Or if with the finger of Providence He points out the steps of some course of duty we are to take, the fact of our being Divinely directed is sufficient proof that God will bless us with success, if we faithfully walk in the path of duty of His appointment. There is such a thing as *reading the leadings of Providence*, an attainment at which one may expect to arrive, by carefully and prayerfully watching the course of God's dealings for a period of time. When we can make out that God is pointing out some work for us to do, and we set about doing it, we may count on success, for He does not go back in His purpose. Besides, in anything which He calls us to do, He always promises His presence and help in the doing of it. When He called Joshua, He promised—"I will be with thee, I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." "He sendeth none a warfare on their own charges." In the present case Barak had strong ground to conclude that God was with him, from *the many specific directions given to him*, all of which implied that God had a plan to be carried out, and therefore He would certainly be with the agent whom He employed to carry it out. He also knew that Deborah, who gave him his instructions, was well accredited as the messenger of God, so that what she said had the Divine seal upon it, and was authorised by God. All this was sufficient to form a foundation for a strong faith. In the great majority of cases there is evidence furnished for cherishing a strong faith, were there only a disposition to do so. But in how many cases is that disposition a-wanting!

VICTORY—THE LORD GOING BEFORE.—Verses 12-24.

CRITICAL NOTES —12. And they showed Sisera, etc.] Sisera was the generalissimo of the King of Hazor; to him, therefore, the report was carried, that the revolt of the tribes of Israel from under the hand of Jabin his master had come to a head, and that an army was being collected at Mount Tabor under the captaincy of Barak, with the view of breaking their yoke of servitude. Of this God made use to fulfil His promise, "I will draw to thee, Sisera, with his chariots and multitude," etc. (in verse 7). For Sisera required no further motive to rouse him in a moment to opposition and to vengeance; though we might add here as in Pharaoh's case, that the Lord hardened his heart so that he pursued after the people (comp. Ex. xiv. 3-8). Accordingly we read in—

13. Sisera gathered together all his chariots, etc.] Filled with indignation at the attempt of the long subject nation to recover their liberty, he resolves to put forth the whole mighty force at his command to crush for ever their aspirations after national independence, and reduce them to a state of perpetual vassalage. All the people that were with him from Harosheth of the nations unto the River Kishon.] This seems to indicate that besides Jabin's subjects proper, there were many others in this formidable conscription brought together, mercenaries, or tributaries—a huge host collected out of the whole north-west of Palestine, in addition to the mighty chariot force already specified. The description covers a large breadth of country, sufficient to furnish from one to two hundred thousand men; though the precise number is not given, the only expression used being "his multitude" (27). There seemed to be a powerful confederacy, who said to each other, "come let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance." (Comp. Ps. lxxxiii.)

14. And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day, etc.] It is a sad omission that in

this critical juncture of the national history, we hear nothing of God's priests—the men whose office it was to present the offerings and prayers of the people at the Divine footstool. Had the class become defunct? If not, why such a dead silence in regard to them? Why not appeal to the sacred Urim and Thummim in order to ascertain God's will at this solemn moment? Where was the ark of God before which supplications and confessions might be made? Did the sacred fire still burn? Is not the Lord gone out before thee? "The captain of the Lord's host" fought at the head of the Israelitish army in every battle; unseen He appeared only to Joshua at the beginning of the campaign. But He had gone before the people in the wilderness as their Guide and Protector or Shepherd, though all unseen. For "this is He that was with the church in the wilderness" (Acts vii. 38; Ex. xxiii 20-23; xxxiii. 2; Deut. xviii. 15). And as a proof that this same—not angelic merely, but Divine—Friend was with them still to act as their Saviour, we have a distinct notice of His presence at the beginning of the dark days of the Judges in chap. ii. 1-5. Now He was to act as the general of the army—the Lord's host, and to go forth at the head of that host (Isa. lii. 12). He was Himself the army; the King of Kings.

15. **And the Lord discomfited Sisera and all his chariots, etc., with the edge of the sword, etc.**] The word הָמַם means agitated—dispersed—or rather *confounded* (2 Sam. xxii. 15; Ps. cxliv. 6) (*Keil, Cassel,* etc.), which is more than simple defeat; as if a higher than ordinary power had been at work. It is the same word that is used to express the effect produced on Pharaoh's host, when they pursued after Israel into the sea. "The Lord troubled the host of the Egyptians." It was made manifest that another than human power was arrayed against them. So it was in the destruction of the Canaanites in Joshua x. 10, where the same word is used. In the present case, as well as in that which occurred in Joshua's days, there were two powers at work—the seen and the unseen; the first being enclosed (so to speak) in the other. The matter stood thus—*It was a battle of faith.* There was no visible sign of the Divine presence. There was the greatest possible disparity of force on the side of Israel. It seemed an act of madness, according to all reasonable calculations, for Barak and the people he had assembled to throw themselves against the irresistible chariot force of the Canaanites. No wise soldier leader would have tried conclusions at arms in such circumstances—sheep against wolves, boys against men. Nothing but faith could justify the step which they now took in going down into the plain—faith in the covenant God, in His character and standing promises, in the intimations He had given of specific steps to be taken on this occasion in order to the carrying out of a certain plan of His own, implying that He had a plan, and if so, would certainly carry it out.

Deborah was the guiding spirit of the occasion. The people trusted her as a prophetess of the Lord—the chosen organ for communicating the intimations of His will. All things being ready for the conflict, under an impulse of the Divine Spirit, she calls aloud to Barak, with a tone of authority, as speaking in God's name, that now the moment had arrived when prompt and decisive action must be taken against the enemy, for the Lord Himself—the God who had wrought all the wonders of the past—had gone out before him. Nor would she confine herself to that single sentence, recorded in verse 14, but "with many other words would she testify and exhort," till the whole camp was roused to the highest pitch of fervour. Like a seraphic spirit in human form, faith, hope, and courage flashing from her eyes, and going out like electric sparks from all her features and her movements, the very incarnation of trust in her God, standing before the people, it was no wonder if every man, from Barak downward, became animated with something of the Divine fire, if doubts and fears were cast to the winds, and one feeling filled every breast, that of assurance that victory was already theirs.

The people, too, were all men of faith; or the greater part of them. For "they offered themselves willingly" (chap. v. 2). Their characters were tried in their being called to be soldiers. It was not merely, could they pray to Israel's God, as in the case of Cromwell's "Ironsides," or Havelock's noble regiments. But what included everything else essential to a true religious character—had they practical faith up to the mark of facing all danger out of loyalty to Israel's God? Hence the true force of that word (verse 6)—"Go and *draw* toward Mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of Naphtali and of Zebulun." Every man was to have life and death set before him on the one side, and his duty to his God on the other. Between these he is left to choose. It was no easy thing to go up that hill. Only hearts of steel could try. Many on such terms preferred to continue under their drudgery and their bonds. "The inhabitants of Meroz; the men of Reuben, of Gilead, and of Dan" (chap. v. 23, 15, 16, 17). Not so, many in Zebulun and Naphtali, with the princes of Issachar (chap. v. 18, 15). This character of the people—their being all chosen men, chosen on the ground of their faith, was a most important factor in the case. For on this account, the summons to battle in their case would be felt with the power of a "Thus saith the Lord." Also the fullest measure of the Divine blessing might be expected to crown their efforts. How could such men fail of success, when the faithfulness of their God was pledged to aid them?

Barak their leader was also now risen to the occasion. A man of faith at bottom, he had now got over his first surprise. His doubts would all be solved by Deborah, and no doubt in answer to much prayer he would have grace given according to the day. He now seems fully to realise that the battle is the Lord's, and that the glory of His name and the success of His cause, are

the objects above all others to be gained. He is now assured, that "the Lord of Hosts is on the side of Israel, and that the God of Jacob is their refuge." It is in this spirit that he goes forth to fight, taking his place in the van, and calling on his army, "Follow me, for the time of the Lord's deliverance is come." In the thickest of the fight we see him, and all through to the end, desisting not till he can find the man who had dared to stretch forth his hand against the anointed people of the Lord.

It is manifest from this account, that, *while human instruments are employed to do the great work* contemplated, *these were all animated by the presence and succouring strength of the Spirit of the living God.* That Spirit gives courage to every heart and strength to every arm. He fills every bosom with the assurance of victory, and enables the whole to act as one man in striking the requisite blow. Ten thousand determined men, acting as if with one arm, could accomplish great things under any circumstances. But here the Ruler of all the ten thousand Providential circumstances in life, which may easily prevent the "race going to the swift or the battle to the strong," was on their side, and about to employ His resources on their behalf. Imagine, then, this little army of Barak, at a given moment, making a whirlwind charge down the western side of Tabor, and throwing itself in a compact mass on the ranks of the bewildered foe. Sisera was apparently only in the act of marshalling his mighty forces, putting his chariots in their places, and his footmen in order, when this unexpected avalanche of enthusiasm, came thundering from the hill, ere his preparations were completed. In a moment everything was in confusion. So sudden, and so unlooked for was the rush made, and so extraordinary was the change in the spirit of the assailants from being men of craven hearts, to being men of lion-like spirit, that the Canaanites were stunned and even appalled.

Add to this, the visible signs of the omnipotent hand of Jehovah. In the text these are not given in detail. Only we are informed, that it was "*the Lord*" who "discomfited or confounded Sisera and his host." Also, at the beginning of the fight it is said, "the Lord is gone out before thee." The whole ordering of the battle was His—"I will draw Sisera to thee—I will deliver him into thine hand." It is said also in Deborah's song, "They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." There must then have been visible signs of God's mighty hand. Josephus says that a dreadful thunderstorm came on at the moment of attack, and that extraordinary hail-stones beat with great force in the faces of the foes, so that the bows and slings of the Canaanites were rendered useless, and the men's hands were benumbed with cold. We know that in the battle recorded in Joshua x., "the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon the Canaanites, so that more died in consequence of these stones than from the sword of Israel." Something similar took place on the occasion referred to in 1 Sam. vii. 10. Some even go so far as to imagine that the eyes of Sisera's host were opened like those of Elisha's servant (2 Kings vi. 16, 17), and "behold Mount Tabor was full of horses and chariots of fire round about" Barak's army. This would indeed give a striking meaning to chap. v. 20. But the fact that such a thing took place once, is insufficient ground for bringing it in without any warrant at any other time. Rather we are disposed to think, that if so striking a spectacle as an army of angels with horses and chariots of fire, in the form of a protecting shield to the army of the living God, had really been exhibited, we must have heard of it from the inspired writer himself.

In any event, the host of Sisera were struck with terror, and thrown into confusion all over the field. Thus they became an easy prey to the sword of Barak. That mighty heathen host fell a-trembling, when they saw from all the appearance of things around them, that the old irresistible force, which had destroyed all the nations of Canaan in the days of Joshua, was again awakened and bearing down upon them with overwhelming weight; so that they said to one another, as did the Egyptians, when the Lord pulled off their chariot wheels, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fighteth for them against the Canaanites." Thus the little army of Barak, braced up to the highest degree of courage and confidence, was but one of the elements of the case; there were certain supernatural influences or agencies at work at the same moment, sufficient to show that the mighty God of Jacob was present to defend His people.

15. Sisera lighted down off his chariot and fled away on his feet.] Even the stern-hearted captain shared in the universal panic. "The stout-hearted were spoiled, and none of the men of might did find their hands." Such was his terror that he was glad to leave his chariot and run away on foot; in order no doubt to mislead his pursuers, and get to some retired spot for safety, while they were off the track.

16. Barak pursued.] Though faint-hearted a little at first, from the time that he recovered his faith and began the work of a leader in good earnest, Barak nobly acted his part on to the end, foremost in the fight, and slacking no rein till he had run his course to a successful issue—**all the host fell on the edge of the sword, and there was not a man left.]** The destruction of so large a host was made so complete, that it seemed as if a very special arrangement of Providential circumstances had been made, so as to secure such an awful result. In any ordinary case many would have escaped. But here "*not even to one*"—not a single man was left. The River Kishon swept away vast numbers, for it was then overflowing (chap. v. 21). But it was by means of the sword that most of them were cut off. They were like stricken deer,

many of them smiting down each other, but the majority falling an easy prey to the sword of Barak and his little army of heroes.

17. Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael. etc.] He naturally in his flight takes a northern direction, that being towards Hazor. He must have gone a long way on foot, for the place where he now took rest was many miles from the battle-field. Besides, he was overcome with fatigue, and soon fell fast asleep. In his flight he bethought him of a house, not occupied by an Israelite, but by one who was friendly with Jabin, and might be counted on as affording safe shelter now, when every other spot was a point of danger. It was the house of Heber the Kenite. That family we have already seen (verse 11), though casting in their lot with Israel, originally belonged to a different race, and still kept up the custom of dwelling in tents. For this reason probably Jabin was not bitter against them, as he was to all Israelites. So we are told there was peace between Jabin and the house of Heber the Kenite.] Here, therefore, the fugitive thought he might find temporary refuge. But it is the part of the tent occupied by Jael, not that of Heber, into which he enters. For though they were husband and wife, they had different apartments in the tent according to eastern custom (Gen. xviii. 6, 10; xxiv. 67; xxxi. 33). In the absence of Heber, Arab custom required that Jael, his wife, should perform the duties of hospitality to a stranger. Sisera's claim for protection was as valid as a common claim for hospitality, and could not be refused. Having once received a stranger into his tent, and given him the rites of hospitality, it is then reckoned an invariable rule, which the most unprincipled Arab never fails to observe, that his guest should be concealed in case of danger, and even defended with life from his pursuers. The giving of refreshments was regarded in every instance as a seal to the covenant of peace and safety. It is probable that Jael introduced Sisera for safety into the inner part of the tent—the woman's division—where no man dared to enter without her permission, under the severest penalty.

18. She covered him with a mantle.] A close covering or *rug*—perhaps the rug on the ground on which Jael slept, it being the Oriental custom to sleep on mats, or rugs stretched on the ground (*Lias*). *The Targum* regards it as a *καυνάκη*, a covering rough on one side. It was a close covering, fitted to conceal the soldier who lay beneath it. Some make it the *counterpane*. It ought here to be noted that the Kenites, the people to whom Heber belonged retained till now, and long after this, the habits of their primitive tent life. The Rechabites referred to in Jeremiah's day were a nomadic tribe belonging to the Kenites of Hemath (1 Chron ii. 55) of the family of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. They came into Canaan with the Israelites, but to preserve their independence chose a life in tents, without a fixed habitation (1 Sam. xv. 6). They seem to have been proselytes of the gate. Their clinging to tent life on to Jeremiah's time is proved by the passage in Jér. xxxv. 7-10.

On Verses 18-22, see chap. v 24-27.

23. So God subdued, etc.] Not Barak, Deborah, or the people; but God did it.

24. Hand of Israel prospered and prevailed.] *Lit.* "continued going on and proving heavy." There was progress in the successes against Jabin, as in 2 Sam. v. 10; iii. 1; Gen. xxvi. 13. Israel's hand increased in its presence on Jabin till he was destroyed.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 12-24.

Lessons from the Battlefield.

1. The Church's Battles under the Old Dispensation were fought with carnal weapons. The people of Israel formed, throughout their whole history, the Church of the living God. They were never left to themselves to guide their own history, or to seek to attain ends such as might seem good to themselves, or might be for their own glorification. They were the property of another, and the very end of their existence was to glorify another. This fact they were never allowed to forget. Hence (1.) *Every battle they fought was ordered by their God.* Should they enter into any battle without asking counsel of their God it was an offence against their true and proper King. On this principle it was disobedience and distrust not to go up against the Canaanites when they heard the report of the spies; and again, when they were forbidden to go up, it was presumption in them to do so, when they saw the fatal consequences of

their unbelief. In like manner, in all Joshua's campaign, not a single battle was undertaken on his own responsibility. He was simply a sword in God's hand. All the battles in this book of Judges were specially ordered by God, as an attentive perusal of the first few chapters alone will show. It is the same with all that is recorded in every historical book of the Old Testament. But it was not so with all the other battles which the nations of the world fought with one another. Though God's general providence includes all events, and all actors in the world's history, there was no such special taking in hand, and directing the national movements of any other country as in the case of the Israelites. The great reason was :—(2.) *Every battle they fought was to serve the interests of God's Church.* It was in no case to exalt the martial prowess of Israel over the nations. In every instance, from beginning to end of their history, the glory of their God over all the gods of the nations was the end to be gained, and not their national fame; or if they are sometimes spoken of as superior to any other people, it is solely because their God has made them so, and for the purpose of showing forth His glory, not theirs. Their very existence on earth was to be a church for the living God. Their battles, therefore, had always a spiritual or holy end in view. They were really the battles of the living God as against the dumb idols—the Holy One of Israel and His people, as against "the rulers of the darkness of this world" and the multitudes of their wicked subjects. (3). *Though the end was spiritual, it was necessary to make use of carnal weapons as the means.* In the old Dispensation, that mighty spiritual weapon, called "the sword of the Spirit," had not yet been drawn from its scabbard. "Christ crucified"—was as yet "a mystery hid from the ages," and in its absence other means must be used. The weapons must correspond with the times in which they are to be used. The nations of the world as yet lived down at the low level of deep spiritual ignorance of God and His ways, and owned as their only rules to act by force, by violence, by cruelty, and to give natural expression to every evil passion. Such was the sort of world the Church in its imperfectly formed state had to pass through. It was also the first stage of God's dealing with His Church—when he taught His truths by pictures and signs in the external world. He appealed to men's *senses* rather than to their *spiritualised reason.* Laws for the conscience and the heart came through an elaborate system of sensible ceremonies and symbols. In correspondence with this, the vindication of God's truth, and the maintenance of the Church's interests in the world, were effected by the use of external force, strictly regulated by God's commands. The arrangement was confessedly temporary and imperfect. But the fact that so horrible a thing as war with carnal weapons was necessary to keep alive God's truth in the earth and to prevent the extinction of His Church was not only a sad proof of the world's enmity against God, but also a conclusive argument for some more effectual means being used to bring back the world to God. To lead this proof in full, long time was given that the conclusion might be more perfectly made out. And now we have the reign of the love of God and the peace of God through Jesus Christ, as the true method of governing a restored world, established on an everlasting basis. (4). *The great disadvantages of using carnal weapons.* It is always stern work to go to the battle field. The work of shedding human blood by the sword is always most revolting. It is the vocation of the tyrant or the beast of prey. It transforms man into a savage, and kills out of his breast all the kindlier feelings. It is to make man the most terrible enemy of man. It is to rouse all the most ferocious passions that belong to our fallen human nature, and let loose the raging of the evil feelings—legions in number—that slumber unknown in the deep cavities of the heart. How can the spirit of peace and love live in an atmosphere of passion and revenge! How can the work of God be promoted

by destroying man, made after the image of God! How can our own personal profit be advanced, when ruthlessly taking the life of a fellow creature!

Yet war was to the religious man in ancient times often a commanded duty. However stern the work, it was only commensurate with the stern necessities of the times which called for it. It was oftentimes the visible and well-deserved punishment of the wicked for their wicked deeds. It was often God meeting the ungodly on their own ground, and showing what jealousy and reverence must be maintained for His great name. But what a mighty relief it is for those who live in the times of "peace on earth and good will to men." No human instrument is now to be used but that of the tongue. No weapon, but the word of reconciliation. No spirit, but the meekness and the gentleness of Christ. Now we do not look at the hard metal by which the body may be cut to pieces, but we have regard to the iron that enters into the soul. We now carry on war with sin in the heart—our own hearts, or those of others. Evil principle and evil purpose must be subdued there. Evil principles, evil schemes, and evil practices in the world everywhere must be put down. And one weapon is sufficient for every purpose—the quick, sharp, powerful two-edged sword of the Spirit of God.

2. God employs great variety of instruments in carrying out His purposes. The honour of service, and the distinction of success are not confined to one person alone. Even the mighty and the noble have sometimes to come down from their seats, while the Ruler of Providence "exalts the man of low degree, that no flesh might glory in His presence." Who could have supposed that in a great crisis, when all that was precious in the Church of God was at stake, a solitary woman should be brought to the front, and through her an agency should be set on foot that would effectually stem the tide of oppression and bring back the best days of Israel's history? The mighty king that sat frowning like an overshadowing cloud over the land and defying the armies of the living God, finds more than his match in one of the weaker sex. When the warriors had all disappeared, when there were no kings nor princes to lead on the nation to assert its independence, when true piety seemed to have taken refuge in the dens and caves of the earth, and when the enemy swept like a flood over all the homes of Israel—then God was pleased to raise up a woman to be the "saviour" of His Church and people. Formerly He had made use of a man without the natural use of his right hand in a great extremity; at another time, a man taken from the plough, able only to wield an ox-goad; still again a foreigner dwelling in Israel but not of Israelitish blood. And in after years we know He used sometimes a man of Herculean strength like Samson, an outcast Gileadite like Jephthah, or one of the least of a poor family in Manasseh like Gideon—all of them most unlikely to be chosen, as seeming to be unfit, for the service of God's Church in her days of great trial. But in this very circumstance lies an important element of their fitness, that in not possessing of themselves qualifications sufficient to meet the emergency, but full of faith in the resources of Him who has called them, they all the more distinctly prove "that the excellency of the power is of God and not of them."

Barak cannot originate a scheme to meet the emergency, and if he could, has not the courage to carry it through. Deborah has the plan of what should be done set before her by God; and, though she cannot go out herself to battle, she has ardour and faith enough to inspire the hesitating Barak with a zeal and fortitude equal to the occasion. There is work for both, and the work of each cannot be done by the other. "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you." Sometimes, indeed, the more feeble members are the more necessary.

And what shall we say of Jael? God has need of her in this singular adjustment of agencies. She is brought in to carry away an honour that might and would have belonged to Barak had he firmly stood the test when put to the proof. How singularly she is brought in! Not an Israelite, but a member of a heathen family, who in Moses' days forsook their worship of idols and did cast in their lot with the people of the living God—a family that kept fast by the worship of Jehovah amid all the changes that swept over the land of Israel. Travelling from point to point in the land of Israel, Heber had now pitched his tent near to Kedish-Naphtali, but keeping up his distinctive character as a Kenite, and therefore a naturalised foreigner The Lord has now need of one in this house, who can better serve the purpose than a native-born Israelite—one of foreign blood and therefore one to whose dwelling Sisera would come for shelter, yet one of Israelitish faith, and full of zeal for the cause of Israel's God. Who could have thought such an one could be so easily found?

3. God makes use of men unconsciously to do His will. To Barak He said, "I will draw unto thee to the River Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army," etc. Yet all that is done to induce Sisera to collect his army there is the report carried to him that Barak had planted the standard of revolt on Mount Tabor. (verse 12.) There is no constraint put on Sisera; he is left entirely free to himself. It is of his own free will that he resolves to collect his army round the base of Mount Tabor. He never once thought of Israel's God in the matter. Nothing was farther from his thoughts than to imagine that he was but an instrument in the hands of that God to bring to pass His deep purposes. Nor do the wicked ever think of this. "They boast of their heart's desire; and through the pride of their countenance they will not acknowledge God; God is not in all their thoughts." Their language is, "I am, and there is none besides me." *It is indeed, according to every man's consciousness, that he is not put under the slightest restraint in his action.* Were it to be so, the first principle of moral government would be interfered with—the freedom of the subject of moral government. But while that is preserved complete, God has still such entire control over his own creature, that He can employ him as an instrument in His hand to fulfil His purposes as it may seem good to Him. How can it be so? One step we can explain. God acts by every creature He has made, according to the faculties He has bestowed upon him. To man He has given the god-like faculty of free will, and in all His dealings with him, the Maker allows the fullest exercise of that faculty to His creature. But free will is governed or influenced by motives, and according as the motives set before it may be in agreement with its inclinations, so is it led to decide. God, having entire control of all possible motives that can influence the human mind, as He is Supreme Ruler in Providence, has but to adjust the proper motives which shall induce the human will to decide this way or that way, in a given case, and the end is gained.

There is no compulsion used in leading a man to adopt a particular line of action, while yet God makes use of him to accomplish His purposes as He pleases. In thus making use of him He does not begin by destroying his liberty of will to decide as he may choose; but having respect to that, He takes means to influence that will legitimately according to its inclinations, and so leads it to decide in such a manner as shall execute His will. Thus far we can go. But there are questions at the back of this which demand an answer; but this is not the place to enter on these. It is enough at present, if the great principle is acknowledged that while men feel perfectly free to act in all matters according to their own inclinations, God yet employs them as He sees meet, to execute

any purpose which He pleases to have fulfilled in the course of His holy providence.

In the case of Sisera, it is easy to see how he was led to fulfil God's purpose, in marshalling his army on the plain through which the River Kishon flowed. The report of the daring of Jabin's vassals to try to break the yoke, that had been so long rivetted on their necks, would act like an electric shock on the mind of the high-spirited general, and rouse him to unwonted energy in collecting an army. The same motive would induce him to bring out all his resources at once, so as to inflict a crushing defeat on the people, on whom he wished to trample; but thus, in case of defeat, which God intended, he prepared an occasion for the whole strength of the nation being broken at one blow. God employed him unconsciously to do His will, in effecting the complete emancipation of His chosen Israel from the oppression of the cruel Canaanitish king.

4. **The Lord's battles are always gained through faith.** *In the Lord's battles, the Lord Himself must always be present, and faith makes Him present.* It is the province of faith to say, "*Lord! without thee we can do nothing. We have no might against the great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee. Thine is the greatness, and the power, and the victory. In thine hand it is to give strength to all. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman watcheth in vain.*" And when the victory has been gained faith adds, "*If the Lord had not been on our side when men rose against us, then they had swallowed us up quick—the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.*" Battles gained through faith are thus always glorifying to God. Because—

(1.) *It is His purpose that is to be gained by the battle.* Barak felt that he was nothing but an instrument. He had nothing to fight for of his own. There was no plan shaping itself before his mind in the exercise of his own ingenuity. The deliverance of God's Church from vassalage and from burdens he knew to be the one object in view, along with the destruction of the Church's enemies, and thereby the vindication of the name of the God of Israel in the sight of the heathen. For that with all his might he fought. The idea of showing that superior prowess belonged to the army of Israel over that of Canaan; or that his skill of generalship was superior to that of Sisera, did not for a moment cross his mind. The reverse of this was too obvious a fact to be disputed. No circumstances could make it clearer that this battle was entirely God's own, and fought in the interest of showing forth His glory.

(2.) *It is by His means that success comes.* Barak owed his valour to the fact that God's Spirit rested upon him. The people did the same. For manifestly God poured out His Spirit on those who so "willingly offered themselves" at the greatest personal risk to vindicate the honour of His name. The courage which led them to jeopard their lives in the high places of the field, and the extraordinary feat they performed in the destruction of the whole of Sisera's army, prove that special aid must have been given them. It was God, too, that ordered the battle. All the steps were laid down by Him. It was, also, through special signs from heaven that the Canaanitish host were struck with terror and fled before the sword of Israel. And it was of God that the River Kishon should have risen so far above its mark even in high flood, and, overflowing its banks, should have swept away so many whom the sword did not slay (chap. v. 21).

(3.) *God honours faith because faith honours Him.* It was greatly honouring to God to believe that He would make the handful of the Church's

defenders on Mount Tabor—a raw and undisciplined force—too mighty for Sisera's warriors to stand before them. To take His word for it, that if His people went forth at His call, however insignificant in numbers and resources, He would "give power to the faint, and to them that had no might He would increase strength, so that they would mount up as on eagle's wings, run and not be weary, and walk and not faint," and on the faith of that assurance to go into battle against such overwhelming odds, was most honouring to the trustworthiness of the Divine character. Indeed, faith is the exercise of the soul looking away from one's self and all other objects, and fixing on God alone as its stay, strength, and shield, thus making everything of God, and keeping all things else in the background. No wonder if such a man is "compassed about with the Divine favour as with a shield," and that Omnipotence will, sooner or later, be found operating on his side. "Them that honour me, I will honour." The Saviour's invariable rule with all who came to Him in distress was, "According to your faith so be it unto you. If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." The great work of the soul's eternal salvation is made to depend solely on believing; and the most honourable list of names known in God's Church is the list of those "Elders, who by faith obtained a good report."

5. The importance of God's people helping each other in the day of battle. "If thou wilt go with me then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, I will not go." This confession was not to Barak's credit. It showed a limping faith at least, though it did not prove the want of loyalty altogether. But it showed what stress he put on the aid he might receive from Deborah. That to him was so important a consideration that it turned the balance. Deborah seeing the necessity of the case did consent to go; for their was no rule transgressed by her compliance, and the emergency for Israel's well-being at the moment was so great, that she felt every other consideration must give way to gain the success of the enterprise in hand. Barak looked to her as the medium chosen by God for the communication of His will, and hence felt that her presence was of the greatest possible consequence. As a matter of fact, though the account given in the text is very brief, we may fairly infer, that she not only gave directions to Barak as to how to proceed with the arrangements, but also that she was of the greatest service in stirring up the faith, patriotism, and pious zeal of all around her, beginning with the captain himself and going down to the meanest in the ranks. She was the soul of the army; and that soul was one of burning energy, and of genuine loyalty to her God. Nor did she stop, until every man of the ten thousand had got a soul infused into him of equal energy and fervour with her own.

So helpful may God's people be to each other in times of great difficulty. Their mere presence and sympathy with each other in fighting the battle of truth against error, or of righteousness against sin, is of itself the greatest possible encouragement. Even the Saviour Himself, in the hour of His terrible agony, showed the need of a weak human nature, by imploring His own disciples to give Him their feeble aid, such as it was. "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" It was like a strong man clinging to a few straws in the midst of the torrent; or like a father seeking a little comfort from the prattle and sympathy of three of his own little children, when pressed down under the weight of an intolerable burden. The duty and the advantage of helping each other when carrying on the Lord's work was recognised by the Master Himself when He sent out His disciples to preach His Gospel, in the form of two and two going together. When Peter and John had to fight so hard a battle before the Sanhedrim, it was very helpful to them at the close to be able to "go to their own company and report all that the chief priests and elders had done," and

follow this up by "lifting up their voices with one accord," and so to put the whole case anew into the hands of the exalted Saviour, asking grace that they might be able on other occasions to prove themselves worthy of Him whom they served. And the answer was given (Acts iv. 23, 24, with v. 29–42). Paul, notwithstanding the abundant grace conferred on him, confesses his obligations to be so deep to many who were his fellow-helpers in the cause of Christ, that but for their succour we are led to conclude, he never could have gone through the work and the struggle that he did. What help did he get from their Christian fellowship, their sympathy, their prayers, their counsels, and their many services in connection with carrying on the work! Rom. xvi., and the closing chapter of several other Epistles, contain allusions to several "fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God," who were of the greatest service to him in his work. On some names he puts a special emphasis—the Timothys, Epaphroditus-es, Zychicus-es, Onesimus-es, and certain others, not to speak of the labourers of the first class, such as Barnabas first, and Silas afterwards.

The same principle is illustrated in Church History from the earliest years to the present time. We uniformly perceive the triumphs of the gospel to be owing in large degree to the practical union, and mutual help-giving of Christians among each other in carrying on their great work. What striking proof of this have we in such examples as those of Luther, Melancthon, the Elector of Saxony, and the many other Reformers who succoured each other in duty and danger? Were not the ultimate successes of missions in the South Seas largely due to this? Might not such men as Carey, Henry Martyn, and D. Brainerd have done much more in the pit of heathenism, had the Christians at home held the rope better? Is not the whole Church-history of this country, for centuries, a prolonged evidence of the value of mutual help in doing the Lord's work?

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 12–24

Variety of Gifts in the Church.

This is suggested by the variety of persons and characters introduced to notice, in this striking episode of Church history. *Deborah* tops the list with her strong faith, force, and fervour of genuine piety, dauntless courage, unflagging zeal, fertility of resource, and supreme faculty of infusing into others her own spirit. *Barak* comes next, with true faith, but greatly troubled with doubt and fear, depressed with the low condition of his church and people, consciously incompetent to meet the emergency, yet not unwilling to do what he can, if only others would come forward with counsel and aid. Next come "*the willing people*" (verse 2), all of them self-devoted to this work, because it is the cause of their God they have in their hands, and His glory in the good of His Church, is the end they ardently seek. They are not the rich and noble of the land, but for the most part appear to have been the workers in iron, who were employed by Jabin probably in making his iron chariots, and the hewers of timber, whom he employed in large numbers in cutting down his forests in the district of Harosheth, and utilising the wood by transporting it to Zidon. These, all with stout hearts and brawny arms, would give service in the battle-field.

Besides these, in the foreground of the story we read, that "*out of Machir* (tribe of Manasseh, to the West of Jordan) *came down governors,*" or chieftains; "*and out of Zebulun* they *that handle the pen of the writer*"—or *staff of the officer*, as some make it—the military scribe, whose duty it was to keep the muster roll, and superintend the recruiting of the army

(2 Kings xxv. 19). *The princes of Issachar*, too, gave their help, doubtless in their own proper capacity. Others are also alluded to as being there on the great occasion. All wrought in their place, and all gave a willing service. And lastly came *Jael*, whose act brought the whole strange chapter of events to a close.

Thus one great result was brought about by the employment of a variety of agents, each doing what was his part to do; and this was according to the counsel of Him who ordered the battle.

1. A variety of gifts in the Church is a necessity. In carrying on the work of the Church, all the different aspects of human life must be met, for in the constant turning of the kaleidoscope, each of these in turn must have an agency provided which is adapted to the circumstances. No one worker, however versatile his genius, can be expected to show superiority of skill all round the compass, and to be as thoroughly proficient in every department as the specialist of that department. There are all manner of trades and professions in civil and social life, and so there may be expected to be persons of all classes, and of all kinds and degrees of capacity for usefulness in the Church. There is every possible variety of work to be done, every variety of station to occupy, every variety of qualification to be exercised, and every phase of danger to be met. All have their respective places to occupy in a very complicate arrangement. No man can do his neighbour's work so well as his own; and each is responsible for doing what belongs to him to do, or that which he is qualified to do, whatever may be done or left undone by those around him.

All the members of the human body have their respective functions to perform. The eye is for seeing, the tongue for speaking or singing, the ear for hearing, the nose for smelling, and the hand for touching, grasping, or working. "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing; if the whole were hearing, where were the smelling." So in the Church there are different offices to fill and different functions to discharge. Some are church office-bearers, and others are private church-members. Some have the gift specially for acquiring knowledge suitable for the church's instruction, others have the skill for imparting it. Some have a special adaptation for the training of the young, others for teaching and enforcing truth in the public assembly. Some have the faculty of addressing men in a popular style of thought, and others the capacity of meeting the wishes and tastes of the scholarly and refined. "There are diversities of gifts, but it is the same Spirit; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God who worketh all in all."

2. God bestows the gifts according to His good pleasure. All the qualifications possessed by all the workers are gifts conferred on them by God. No man's genius is a thing of his own acquirement, or an heir-loom handed down to him by his ancestors. His possessions, too, though they may come in one sense as the result of his own industry or skill, yet would never come without the ordering of God's over-ruling Providence. "The Lord maketh rich." Every man's special faculty for work is given him originally by his Maker. For God confers on every man some endowment, but the nature of it, and the measure of it, God himself determines. He has made the gifts exceedingly diverse one from another. "He who taught the lark to trill, has taught the eagle to scream. He who moulded the dewdrop, and caused it to hang in silence on the fringe of the flower, poured out the boundless sea, and caused it to roar night and day as if uttering the prayer of all earthly troubles." "In the same pasture the ox can find fodder, the hound a hare, the stork a lizard, the fair maid flowers."

"On the face of a watch there are three workers, or, as we usually call them, hands—the second-pointer mak-

ing rapid revolutions, the minute-pointer going at reduced speed, and the hour-pointer, which is more tardy still. Any one, not knowing the mechanism, would suppose that the busy little second-pointer was doing all the work. It is clicking away at sixty times the speed of the minute-pointer; and as for the hour-pointer, it seems to be doing no work at all. So is it in the church. There are active fussy men who appear to be doing the whole work, while others seem to be doing little or nothing at all. But can we do without the hour and minute-pointers? The noisy second-hand might go its round for ever without telling the world the true time. The silent steady hour-hand need not envy its noisy little colleague. It gives by far the most valuable information. Every man's duty is to do his allotted work, so as to gain the approbation of the Master whom he serves."—(*Parker.*)

But as no one key can open all locks, so no one man possesses all the gifts. God has made no man so rich in genius or resources, but that he is dependent on some other men, as the wheel goes round. The strongest is not unfrequently made to depend on the weakest, and the highest on the lowest. Even the little mouse (in the fable) is made to gnaw the meshes of the lion's net, and set free the lord of the forest. The little captive maid may direct the mighty captain of the host of Syria where to find a cure for his leprosy.

God so distributes his gifts to all that the most highly-gifted shall feel he is still not independent of those beneath him, and all shall feel that what they possess is not their own, but talents given to trade with for another, while at any moment they may be called to give an account of their stewardship. All the best gifts are not conferred on any one man, lest he should become arrogant towards his fellows, and begin to glory in the presence of the Sovereign Giver! Even with the best of men care is taken to avoid ground for boasting, and those most richly endowed are made to realise their need for succour from those around them. In the conducting of such a great movement as the Reformation from Popery in the sixteenth century, such qualities were needed as a Boanerges-like spirit, great powers of reasoning, force, fervour, passion, energy of character, on the one hand; and, on the other, a well-balanced judgment, learning, depth of insight, along with patience, caution, and equanimity of spirit. God divided these gifts, conferring the former on Luther, and the latter on Melancthon; but they were all put at the service of the church. Luther, gifted as he was, felt he could not do without Melancthon, and Melancthon felt that the work could not go on without Luther. Both, too, were ever made to feel that their all-sufficiency was of God.

Again, in the ordinary distribution of mental gifts among men, we find checks put on vanity and pride. Some possess the gift of genius, and exhibit feats of mental ability which excite the envy and the admiration of those around them; but yet, in regard to several of the ordinary faculties of mind, they are only on a par with those around them, or are even inferior. Others, again, are gifted with great intellectual grasp and strong powers of reasoning, but are deficient in fertility of imagination, and in skilfully decorating their thoughts with fit drapery of language. Some are mighty rhetoricians and brilliant orators, who can elicit the applause of the multitude, and yet they want capacity to excavate in the deeper mines of thought, and to build up solid structures of maxims and rules for men's guidance in the practical affairs of life. In all cases gifts are so bestowed as to prevent boasting on the part of the recipients, and to make all feel their mutual dependence on one another.

God would also show His sovereign right to bestow His gifts entirely according to His own good pleasure, to bless one after this manner, and another after that. He assigns to one man a place in His church here, and to another

there, as it seemeth good in His sight. Not that any are ever treated unjustly or unkindly. But as none receive their gifts as a matter of claim, God shows His right in His own creature, in endowing him with this or that faculty as it pleaseth Him, in order to gain the ends of His own wisdom. Thus He qualifies some to occupy a higher place in His Church; others, a lower. Some are qualified to teach and build up in the faith; others, to devise plans and institute organisations for carrying on the work of the Church. Some have special aptitudes for attending to financial affairs; others for conducting religious meetings, and attending to the spiritual well-being of the Church. Some find their element in the instruction of the young, and in rendering the work of religion attractive to their youthful minds; while others are more adapted to sympathise with the aged and the infirm, to give succour to those that are in distress, and to comfort the feeble-minded.

3. This variety is a feature of great beauty to the Church. The Church is not a vast surface of dead uniformity; were it so, the spectacle presented would be tame, monotonous, uninteresting. But as God has arranged things in the world of nature, so has He done in His Church. There is every possible diversity of taste, of disposition, of temperament, of qualification, among the members of His Church. While all exhibit a family-likeness of character, each has some special features of spiritual beauty peculiar to himself, his own tint and hue of loveliness, or his own special faculty of service, which none possess precisely the same in kind or degree but himself. This diversity of excellence, extending over the whole community of the Christian brotherhood, gives to the Church the appearance of a body of manifold interest and beauty. It is as when a light is reflected from a multiplying glass, in which all the surfaces are differently sized, differently coloured, differently cut, and all placed at different angles, there is a spectacle presented of endlessly diversified lights and colours—of manifold beauty—yet all arising from one and the same light falling on many surfaces.

(1.) *We see this element of beauty in Nature:*—"Amongst the trees of the wood there is great variety—the sturdy oak; the flexile willow; the solid maple; the graceful ash; the terraced cedar, with cones uprising through each grassy-looking lawn of tender leafery; the larch, hanging its scarlet blossoms from every pointed arch of its green pagoda; the stiff, stout holly, disdainful of the breeze; the fidgety aspen, all in a flutter at the faintest sigh; the spacious chestnut; the strict, solemn cypress, with every twiglet pointing straight up to heaven. So, too, with the bark of the timber—the ebony, sinking like stone; the cork, riding on the crest of the billow; the elder, so soft and spongy; the box, in his firm structure, retentive of the finest engraving; the homely deal, and thyine veneer—beautiful some, but useful all, and not to be interchanged with advantage.

(2.) "*So is it with men's minds.* Melancthon would have made a poor substitute for Luther, but the absence of Melancthon would have left a poor Reformation. Great as was the invention of the Sunday School, it was not revealed to Bishop Butler, but was reserved for Robert Raikes; and yet if the former had not written the "Analogy," the latter could not have supplied the desideratum. And although Jeremy Taylor and John Bunyan had each a fine fancy, the world is now agreed, that if they had changed places, they could have made it no better; we are quite content with the pilgrim of the one, and the golden grove of the other." [*Hamilton.*]

(3.) *Throughout nature there is a charm in variety.* "The plough is fatal to the picturesque. A country under husbandry, with all God's beautiful flowers cut down and cast out under the name of weeds, is as inferior in point of beauty, as it is superior in point of profit, to moor or

mountain. How tame your levelled fields of wheat or barley compared with the rudest hill side, where green bracken, and the plumes of the fern, and the bells of the foxglove, and brown heath with its purple blossoms, and the hoar, grey, rugged stones that lie scattered in wild confusion, unite to form a mantle, in richness and variety of hues, such as loom never wove and queen never wore. Without this variety, how tame our gardens, with every flower in form and colour the counterpart of another; and how monotonous the music of early morn, did every lark in the sky, linnet in the bush, rook and ringdove in the woods, all utter the same notes!" [*Guthrie.*]

(4.) "*But variety is everywhere.* Each lamb of the flock has a bleat known to its mother; each rose on the bush has its own shape and shade of colour; and, there is not a lark that hangs carolling in the clouds, but has a voice recognised by the brood, above whose grassy nest she sings her morning hymn, calling the drowsy world to rise for worship and for work. So is it in the world of mankind, who, though numbering so many hundred millions, and showing so much similarity of general characteristics, have yet, in the case of each individual, a face and features, a configuration and colour, organs, limbs, and voice peculiarly his own. The same law operates among the fishes, the beasts, the birds, and the insects; it is everywhere also among the stars of the sky; and taking nature as a whole, what a manifold and magnificent diversity do we perceive among the works of God!" [*Guthrie.*]

(5.) "*It is the same in the world of grace and in the Christian Church.* There are different peculiarities among different Christians, which constitutes a charm rather than a defect. A John is pre-eminent for *love*; a Peter for *ardour*; a Paul for *zeal*; a Job for *patience*; a Moses for *meekness*; a David for *devoutness*; a Samuel for a *prayerful* spirit; a Jeremiah for *tenderness*; and an Abraham for *faith*. Yet all have the one Spirit of grace, and all possess one family-likeness. Those greatly mistake the matter who would have all Christians modelled on their own pattern, as, for example, of some modest, retiring, gentle spirits, who cannot appreciate the worth and usefulness of those whom God has cast in a rough mould and made of stern stuff." [*Guthrie.*]

(6.) *Everyone is needed in his place. The Samsons are needed in their place, as well as the Samuels*, to fill up the beauty of the picture. The little captive maid to tell the mighty captain where to go for his cure, as well as the prophet to direct him in God's name what to do. The quiet, simple-hearted Nathanael is needed to pray and to meditate under the fig-tree, as well as the more noisy and demonstrative Peter to be the mouth-piece of his brethren. The meek and soul-absorbed Mary, putting everything aside for Christ as "the one thing needful," has her place, and also the bustling, more pretentious Martha, who is anxious to give the best of welcomes to her Lord. The eloquent and honest, though somewhat blundering Apollos is needed, and also the quieter but better-informed Aquila and Priscilla. The bold warriors are needed to go out into the open field to measure swords with the foe; and also, "the women who remain at home" are of service, in their place, "to distribute the prey." A Luke is needed to act the part of the "beloved physician;" the house of Stephanas to "addict themselves to the ministry of the saints;" an "Epaphras to labour fervently in prayer" for Christian professors, that they may "stand complete in all the will of God;" and Christian widows are required to "wash the saints' feet, to relieve the afflicted, and be patterns of every good work." God has given to every thing a place, and has made every thing beautiful in his place.

4. Every Christian is responsible for making his own contribution for the good of the Church.

Every gift or faculty which a man has is given him in stewardship. It is a talent committed to his trust, of which his Lord says, "Occupy till I come." The giver expects that every talent shall be traded with so as to gain something; some more, some less, according to the number given to trade with. If two are given, it is expected the trader will make other two; if ten are given, the result looked for is other ten, and so on. The fruit tree that occupies the best soil, and has had most time, cost, and labour bestowed upon it, is expected to yield most abundant fruit. "In the ceremonial law, God required more sacrifices from the rich than from the poor; such as had great store of oxen, sheep, and other things to be offered in sacrifice would not have been accepted had they offered "a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons," which yet were acceptable from the poorer sort of persons." "To whom much is given, of them much is required." God had done great things for Eli and for David, and from them expected greater returns of duty and obedience all their lives after; but when they failed in some great particulars, God was sore displeased with them, and reckoning up the great benefits He had conferred, He tells them that He expected other returns from them. Hezekiah, too, having received much, God looked for answerable returns, and was greatly offended when such were not given.

"*God gives to some many gifts, both of nature and of grace.* He gives them much knowledge, learning, wisdom, great riches, honours, offices, places, much time, liberty, great and choice means of grace, special providences and dispensations, and many other things which others have not. Of these persons God requires more than of those who have fewer and less of such things, and their not making suitable returns provokes God against them. But no one, whether having greater or less gifts, is freed from making returns of duty to God, even if he should "have to work with his hands that He may have to give to him that needeth." [*Austen.*]

Every man should devote himself to the task for which he is best qualified. Everyone should ask himself the question—For what am I best qualified? and, on discovering that special faculty, should regard it as the indication of God in His Providence of the line of duty appointed to him in his place. It may be to visit the sick couch; to express sympathy with the destitute, the bereaved, or those in special distress; to counsel the unwary, the inexperienced, or those exposed to strong temptation; to distribute tracts or books, and carry on spiritual conversation from house to house. Or it may be to take a lead in prayer meetings, to strengthen the hands of the Christian pastor, to take part in encouraging all schemes of Christian good-doing, to watch over the spiritual well-being of the Church with which one is connected, and to do all that can be done by conscientious and believing prayer for every person and every interest around us.

"Lord Thurlow was astonished that his kinsman, William Cowper, should have resigned the clerkship of the Lords, because he had not courage to read aloud petitions and minutes; yet, though the Chancellor was himself a stranger to trepidation, it may be questioned, if, even to secure the Great Seal, he could have written 'The Task,' or 'John Gilpin.'"

5. This varied and unequal distribution of gifts calls into exercise many excellent features of the Christian character. What seems at first a great irregularity is really the best means that could be devised for knitting and cementing together the whole body of Christians in one harmonious brotherhood. Those who are rich feel they are debtors to the poor whom God has made dependent on others, and so are called upon to exercise *beneficence.* The poor are made to feel that a great favour is done to them by the rich, and so become bound to them by ties of

gratitude. The one class feel they are making a sacrifice with which God is well pleased, in giving without the expectation of being recompensed again. The other class feel they owe their love, their thanks, and their prayers, to those who have done them a material kindness, and whom they cannot recompense again.

Humility is cultivated by this arrangement, and a sense of creature dependence. Everyone is led to put the question, "What have I that I did not receive? Now if it was received, why dost thou glory as if thou didst not receive it? I am full of wants — a mere empty cistern, and all my supplies are made by the Giver of all good." Self is thus reduced to nothing, and God becomes all in all.

Resignation, or submission to God's will in the ordering of our lot is cultivated. This springs out of a sense of our dependence, for all graces of the Christian character are closely allied as members of one family circle. If I have nothing that I can call my own, then why murmur at any mode of distribution which Divine Providence is pleased to make; God is only disposing His own. Whatever may come to my share is only a favour greater or less—a thing to which I can lay no claim. Let Him take His own way with His own.

> "I dare not choose my lot,
> I would not if I might;
> Choose, then, for me, my God,
> So shall I walk aright."

Contentment is also called into exercise. The family-likeness here between this and the disposition we have spoken of is so strong, that they seem to be twin sisters. To be content is to be meekly satisfied with our share of things. And for this there are many good reasons. Every well-taught Christian will say, if such is the Master's will, I am satisfied. My will is always His will. Besides, I brought nothing into this world, and it is certain I can carry nothing out. And it is always true, were I to receive only what I deserve, I would receive nothing at all.

Other features would also be called into exercise, such as *respect* for all; *fellow-feeling*; *forbearance*; the *absence of jealousies and heart-burnings*; and that *charity* which is a uniting bond all round.

CHAPTER V.

THE THANKSGIVING SONG OF THE REDEEMED CHURCH.—*Verses* 1–11.

CRITICAL NOTES.—The *subject matter* of this song is an ascription of praise to the God of Israel, as the Deliverer of His people in an evil day. While many hands were at work to bring out the happy issue, all the glory is reckoned to be due to Jehovah; or, if others are mentioned, it is as being instruments in His hand. This is the uniform manner of Scripture; hence the tone of piety which marks all its histories and meditations alike.

The *definite purpose* of the ode is, to express the gratitude which Israel owes to its God, for granting so sudden and complete a deliverance from the calamity, which had weighed down the spirit of the nation for twenty years, and had at last become so oppressive that it threatened to extinguish their name from the list of nations in the earth. This expression of gratitude is made in the form of a commemoration of God's goodness, such as might live for the benefit of after ages; for no monument is so sure of preservation, or is of such wide-spread publicity, as that of a poem written with much warmth of feeling and beauty of style by an ardent, enthusiastic spirit, that feels devoutly thankful to God for His great mercies to His covenant people.

The *time* selected for raising this hymn of praise to Jehovah was at the moment of victory—after the work was done, and ere the people had retired to their homes. It was said to be sung "on that day," not literally so, but before the occasion had passed, and in immediate connection with the great deliverance—while the flush of victory still mantled the cheek, while every heart was a glow with gratitude, and while every tongue was attuned to song. Delay cools down; indeed it indicates that the feeling is not irrepressible (2 Chron. xx. 26; Isa. xxxviii 9-22; Luke i. 64-79).

Poetry is selected as the fitting form, in which to give expression to the adoration and thanksgiving so due to God on such an occasion. It better accords with the exultation of the national heart, and those glowing conditions of soul which are kindled by the sense of a newly-won deliverance. Prose usually moves within a fixed frame-work of rules, and partakes somewhat of the coldness and stiffness of artificialism; while poetry, spurning the trammels of art, rises up to a sphere of its own, where natural instincts are the only guide, and where the utterance is prompted by a fervid state of the feelings. The freedom of the poet is the freedom of the eagle, now moving along the smiling fields, now soaring in mid-heaven at pleasure; at one time frequenting the picturesque valley, at another wandering at will among the frowning crags, or dark mountain gorges. But while inspiration may often more fitly express itself in poetic than in other forms of speech, it would be wide of the mark indeed to identify the one with the other in any way whatever. The mountains are higher than the plains, but we never commit the mistake of identifying the highest mountains with the height of the stars. Human inspiration and Divine inspiration are separated by an immense interval. The former often appears in the form of poetical conception and expression, and is identical with it; the latter never so. Of the former there is very little in chaps. iii. and iv., while chap. v. is full of it; but all the chapters in the Book are pervaded by the latter.

The order of thought in the chapter seems to be as follows:—First, comes a general announcement of the subject of song in verse 2. The song itself is then divided into three sections, each containing three strophes, and each strophe consists of three verses. Thus *section first* extends from verses 3 to 11 inclusive—the spirit of which is, to show the immense value of the victory which had been gained, as bringing back the ancient glory of the sacred nation. *The first strophe* (verses 3-5) refers to the happy times of old when Israel was acknowledged before the whole earth as the chosen nation of the living God. This was a fact never to be forgotten; and hence it forms the prelude in almost every sacred hymn that was sung by that people in all their generations. This is attested by the whole Book of Psalms. *The second strophe* (verses 6-8), in a few graphic touches, shows how far the nation had sunk from its former pitch of prosperity. And *strophe third* (verses 9-11) glances at the state of liberty and of peace that would now be enjoyed by the people in the transactions of daily life, as contrasted with the terror to which they had been so long subjected. After a pause, *section second* begins at verses 13-21, and presents us with a vivid account of the actors in the battle, and the means by which victory was decided for Israel. *The first strophe* describes the enthusiastic assembly of the good men and true who gathered themselves together to fight the Lord's battle (verse 13-15). In *strophe second* is set forth the faint-heartedness of those who would risk nothing in fighting such a battle (verses 16-18). And the *third strophe* (verses 19-21) describes the forces of the enemy, and the mighty powers by which they were overwhelmed. *Section third* (verses 23-30) describes the dreadful fate of those who are opposed to God in battle, beginning with the frustration of hopes, and ending in utter ruin. First, a curse is pronounced on the men of indecision (verse 23); next the enemy meets with death where he expected protection to life (verses 24-27); and finally, a contrast is drawn between high expectations formed, and bitter experiences reaped (verses 28-30). The expression of a wish that all God's enemies would so perish (that is, the stubborn and impenitent) concludes the chapter.

1. Then sang Deborah and Barak, etc.] Not equally, or together. The verb for "sang" is singular, and of feminine gender. Deborah was a "prophetess," and the mainspring of the whole movement. We may naturally suppose that she composed this beautiful lyric hymn, which is indeed full of the same force and fire that we see in the other glimpses of this remarkable woman's character. Indeed the hymn itself indicates its authorship (see verses 3, 7, and 12). But Barak is associated with Deborah in the work of thanksgiving, for he, though guided by her, was yet the chief actor, and also represented the victorious host. A similar case occurs in Num. xii. 1, where Miriam and Aaron are said to have spoken together against Moses; but Miriam took the lead in this opposition, and Aaron merely went along. Hence the verb is singular and feminine. So it is here (תָּשַׁר). Deborah, with probably a number of female choristers, would begin the song, while Barak, with a company of men-singers, would respond, or sing the antistrophe, as in Ex. xv. 1-21. There may have been a choir of priests and Levites, or the whole congregation may have joined in the exercise, returning to Mount Tabor for the purpose before dispersing to their homes. They had had no jubilee like it for at least twenty years. Every heart was full, and the difficulty was for anyone to be silent on such an occasion. And not only then, but the whole year round, every home in Israel would daily resound with similar strains of joy and gratitude.

A vast importance attaches to this song, because it was to be preserved among the treasured archives of the nation, and to be taught to the children's children for many generations. Thus it would not only be a permanent memorial of God's mighty acts on behalf of His people, but would form part of the public instruction of the nation for many ages, and so would assist in moulding the characters of myriads of minds, so that those who were not yet created should in due time praise the Lord. This truth is exemplified by the whole Book of Psalms.

That such a composition should have had its birth in such a declining age is indeed a marvel. We do indeed believe in its proper inspiration; for if it were not inspired, why should it form an integral part of the Book of Judges, and why should the Book of Judges form part of the

Canon of Scripture—to which the Saviour Himself set His seal by so frequently referring to it as the sacred Word of God. Yet the literary beauty of the style is not altogether due to the Spirit of inspiration. In the act of inspiration, we believe, that the matter to be communicated to the world, through the medium of a particular human mind as the organ, is communicated by the Divine Spirit, but there is no interference with the natural organisation of that mind, its individual characteristics, or even the measure of its natural gifts, or educational accomplishments. The Spirit communicates the truth through that mind precisely in the way in which it is natural for it to express itself. Hence though even the language we believe to be inspired, it is language selected in the style of the mind that is inspired. Thus the language that dropped from the pen of a David, or an Isaiah, was that of the poet, for it was natural for these men to write poetically. Again, the language employed in the Books of "Kings" and "Chronicles" was natural to such a man as Ezra, or whoever may have been the author of the Books—one accustomed to deal with records, and conversant with facts and figures. In like manner, Deborah was not made a poetess for this particular occasion, and the gift withdrawn immediately on the completion of the ode. Rather do we regard her as having been a poetess by natural gifts and the proper cultivation of them; and in this ode we see the appropriate exercise of those gifts. We are not to suppose that the style here used was in any degree essentially different from what was natural to her. It was Deborah speaking, and not another mind created for the moment under her form; but it was *the highest form* of Deborah's style.

If such a style were natural to Deborah, it is wonderful to meet with such a degree of literary refinement in an age, which is generally reputed to have been so barbarous and rude. Such regularity of accents, such harmony of cadences, and such attention to quantities, render this composition one of the most beautiful specimens of rhythm we have on record. It has all the perfection of art, yet all the freedom of nature—no fetter, yet perfect beauty. *Cassel* says, "There is no want of finish; but the pauses subordinate themselves to the thoughts, and these unfold themselves free as the waves. The peculiar character of the song consists of the boldness of its imagery, and the force of its unusual language—the most interesting feature being its alliteration, which appears in the highest development, as in the old Norse poems." We might add, that it is also distinguished by its abrupt transitions and impassioned appeals, by its apostrophising both of the absent and the present, by its quick seizure of the salient features of the scene, and the dramatically vivid picture it presents, both of occurrences and of persons.

2. Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel, etc.] The order in the original is more emphatic—"for the avenging of the avenges of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves—Praise ye Jehovah!". This is a statement of the subject matter of the poem. The key-note is here pitched. The spirit of the meaning, according to our translation, seems to be, "for the rolling back on the heads of the enemy the long series of injuries which God's Israel had received from them—Praise ye Jehovah." Many find fault with this sentiment, as being not in accordance with the spirit even of the Old Testament, and try to bring a different meaning out of the words. The difficulty lies in the rendering of the phrase פָּרַ֥ע פְּרָעוֹת. *Gesenius* takes it from an Arabic root, signifying "to lead." So also does the Alexandrian MSS. of the Sept. and some modern interpreters, as *Bertheau*, *Ewald*, etc. They accordingly make it, "for the bold leading of the leaders, as well as for the willing offering of themselves by the people. Praise Jehovah!" This is a just idea in itself, but it does not express the *ultimate* sentiment of the song, which refers to what was *done*, and not merely the *manner* of doing it. Besides this is not the direct meaning of the word פָּרַ֥ע, which originally refers to the *hair of the head*, and especially to the long waving hair, as in Ezek. xliv. 20. *Keil* takes this sense of the word, but gives to the meaning an unexpected turn by saying, that as luxuriant hair is the sign of strength, so "the hairy ones" mentioned here mean "the strong in Israel showed themselves strong." The champions in the fight went forth before the others bravely. This is a very free translation indeed, and is scarcely adopted by any others. *Cassel* makes the word signify "to make loose," or to "become wild," as when the hair flies wild and loose about the neck. The person who made a vow of consecration to God was directed to let his hair grow (Num. vi. 5); and the loose waving of his hair in the wind was a visible proof of his having devoted himself to the service of God. This, he says, applies to the whole army of Barak, who all wildly waved their hair in token of their entire consecration to Him. The praise was due for the appearance of so many persons with long locks to fight the battle of their God. He renders it "*That in Israel wildly waved the hair—In the people's self-devotion · Praise God!*" This view also seems to be more ingenious than accurate. The most natural view seems to us to be that given in the authorised version. The head is uncovered, and the hair gets loose and disordered, when one is greatly agitated with some strong feeling—especially that of resentment for great injuries received. It is this condition of the hair that is here indicated by the word פֶּרַע, and when its plural goes along with it, it means the highest degree, or *the fullest measure of vengeance was taken on behalf of Israel.* The plural form of the word is only used here and in Deut. xxxii. 42, where it is translated "revenges" upon the enemy. In what sense the word 'avenges" or "revenges" is to be taken is very important, and will receive due notice afterwards.

When the people willingly offered themselves.] All who would do anything acceptably to God must first give themselves a free-will offering to Him (Rom. xii. 1; 2 Chron. xvii. 16; Ps. cx. 3; 2 Cor. viii. 5). Deborah praises God for conferring on the people this spirit of willingness. An unwilling, or a mechanical service, is one which the God who looketh on the heart cannot accept of. No service without the heart can be pleasing to Him. It is a dead service; and is the same with laying a putrefying corpse upon the altar.

3. Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the Lord, etc.] Having announced the subject, the speaker next calls for the close attention of the audience. It is a tale of such sacred importance as might well have kings for its listeners (comp. Deut. xxxii. 1; Isa. i. 2; xliv. 23; Micah vi. 2). The allusion is not to any special class of kings, such as the kings of Canaan, but to kings in general, as being most dignified in station. Also, perhaps, as representing the powers of this world—that they may bow their heads, and confess they are nothing before Sion's King. Farther, that they might learn the sin, danger, and folly of lifting themselves up against Israel's God. To magnify Israel's God is indeed the aim of the whole history (comp. Ps. ii.). The singer says, she will sing, even she—with marked emphasis, to denote that she will make a special point of doing this service, and she will give her whole heart to the doing of it. Not only would she sing with the mouth, but she would add praise on the "*ten-stringed lute*" or *cithern*—one of the sweetest lyres or harps in use. Such is the force of זָמַר—to *sing to an instrument*, generally a lyre or harp. *Lias* says, "The word is onomatopoetic, and denotes the buzz of the chords of a stringed instrument." Everything in the externals of worship had in that age of signs a deeper meaning than it has with us. The spirit of the statement is—I will take *all the ways of praising my God*, so that the work may be done in the fullest manner. The service of the heart shall be fully given, and that shall be expressed by the use of the sweetest stringed instruments. The name is "*Jehovah, the God of Israel*"—the covenant name of God. This implied that all that God had done for Israel was done on account of His gracious *relations* to that people, and the gracious *promises* He had made to them.

4. Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir, etc.] The singer here breaks off abruptly, and goes back at a bound over nearly 200 years to the time when God first adopted this people to be His own. This abrupt manner of shooting from point to point, selecting the chief points of the ever memorable history; and graphically grouping them together, is quite in the style of Hebrew poetry. Here the point of view occupied is *what God was when He first met with them as a nation*. What He showed Himself to be then was a standard for them to reckon by in all their after history. They might count with good reason that He would in all their after history be to them the same God that he was then. What was He then? The group of mountains which are usually known by the name of Sinai, or Horeb, were within the large tract of country known as Edom, or Seir. Indeed, the name "Seir" was sometimes given to the whole mountainous district which included Sinai (Deut. xxxiii. 2). The boundary lines of the districts in the wilderness do not appear to have been very sharply defined. The scene at the giving of the law is doubtless referred to, with all the displays of unequalled majesty which Jehovah then made. He then made a revelation of Himself, showing what kind of a God He was—infinite in power, of sovereign authority, most jealous of His great name, of spotless purity, of inviolable truth, and resplendent in righteousness; while at the same time merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, etc. This character was most impressively displayed at Mount Sinai, and the memory of it was to be kept up at every step in all their future history, that they might have vividly before their minds the character of the God to whom they sustained so close a relation, and with whom they were in constant dealing. The application to the present case was, that the same glorious perfections of character which Jehovah manifested at Sinai were now displayed against Sisera and his host, in so far as the case required, and that God was faithful in keeping His word to His people even at that distance of time. One broad feature of the Sinai scene is seized on as specially fit to be mentioned in connection with the destruction of Jabin's army—the mighty power of the God of Israel. The solid earth trembled under His step as He marched out through the wilderness at the head of His people; referring to the fact, that when God came down on Mount Sinai to enter into covenant with Israel, "the whole mount quaked greatly."

The heavens dropped, the clouds dropped water.] In Exod. xix. we read of a "thick cloud" and of "thunders"—in chap. xx. 21 we read of the "thick darkness where God was." In Heb. xii. 18 we read of a "tempest" as well as of "blackness and darkness." In Ps. lxviii. 8, 9, we read that the "heavens dropped at the presence of God, and He sent a plentiful rain." In Ps. lxxvii. 17, 18, we are told "the clouds poured out water, the sky sent out a sound, etc." All these references seem to point to the Sinai scene, and warrant us to conclude there was a thunder-storm, with a deluge of rain at the time of the giving of the law. It was an unheard of thing that that perpetually clear firmament should be darkened with thick clouds, and that that ever-brazen sky should pour water in floods on the arid sands of the desert.

5. The mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai, etc.] נָזְלוּ Many render *shook* or staggered. So *Sept.*, *Keil*, *Cassel*, *Lias*, *etc.* The Greek, Chald., Arab, and Syr. This rendering is the most direct meaning of the word employed, and is supported by Isa. lxiv 1 3.

which should be translated "might tremble at thy presence"—Even that Sinai, etc.] Rather "*this* Sinai," as if it were actually before her eye. It makes the account more vivid. Full of rocks though Sinai was, with rock piled on rock all the way to the summit, and, therefore, might be supposed firm as adamant, it yet trembled like a leaf in the wind! No wonder that Sisera with all his iron chariots could not stand before such a God as this!

6. In the days of Shamgar, etc.] These verses (6-8) were probably sang by a responsive choir to those who sang the verses going before (3-5). The singer now as abruptly returns to the times of Deborah, as at first she left them to sing of Sinai. Nothing is lost in preface. Even of the main subject only a few strokes are given. The purpose now is, to put the present down-trodden condition of Israel, when lying under the heel of the oppressor, in contrast with the enviable condition in which they stood, when so highly favoured of their God in the wilderness (Deut. iv. 7, 32-38.)

Some would read, "*After* the days of Shamgar," etc., or *since* his days. But this looks like leaving the natural interpretation of the phrase in order to get quit of a difficulty. Why not keep by the usual rendering? "*In* the days of Shamgar—and of Jael." This Jael was not another Jael then the wife of Heber. Such a supposition (see Cassel) is purely arbitrary, and is merely adopted to escape a difficulty. Why not suppose these two persons to be contemporary? And why not regard the phrase to mean simply—in the days which Shamgar *had to deal with*—the hard times which he had to contend with; and so of Jael. These were the days *on which their lot was cast*, which they endured for a time—it might be for some years, but which at length, they were the means of entirely changing into a long course of bright and sunny days—so that all around them had the privilege of singing, "according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil, so do thou make us glad." The poem may have been composed very soon—perhaps within a day or two after the terrible slaughter of Sisera's army; but it is thrown into a form suitable for being sung in after ages. We believe Shamgar's ground was somewhere in the South-West of the land; and we know Jael's home was in the North of Israel.

The highways were unoccupied, or deserted.] *Lit.* the paths ceased. There was no security on the public highways of the country—no safety for life and property, and hence no one could leave his house in peace, and go along the public roads to do the duties of business. The enemy were prowling in all directions, and travellers were afraid to walk in the usual highways, lest they should be either robbed or murdered—perhaps both. Reference is made to such times, supposed to be the days of the Judges, and to no times more fitly than the present, in 2 Chron. xv. 5. And the travellers walked through by-ways.] Those who were obliged to travel at all slunk into concealed by-paths to elude the bands of the oppressor. They are called "twisted paths," or circuitous footpaths, which turned away from the high roads. The caravans proper had ceased to exist; there were only foot passengers anywhere to be seen moving through the land. Trade had been completely driven off the roads. Business was at a standstill everywhere. The whole population were in hiding! They were afraid to show themselves in public at any point.

7. The inhabitants of the villages ceased.] Rather the *villages ceased*. *Cassel* makes it, *the open places, the hamlets*, which were unwalled, and, therefore, liable to become a prey to the spoiler. It was thus in Hungary in the 17th century when it was overrun by the Turks. The dwellers in the open flat country, with unwalled villages (the farmers and others) in contra-distinction to the walled towns disappeared (Deut. iii. 5; 1 Samuel vi. 18; Ezek. xxxviii. 11.) "Lawlessness and terror prevailed, and the intercourse of commerce was unknown. The sons were afraid to traverse the plains which their fathers had conquered, and stayed shivering at home." (*Wiseman*). Compare the times of the captivity as pictured by Zechariah in chap. vii. 14; or that seen in the visions of Isaiah as the natural effects of sinful times. (Isa. xxxiii. 8). That there should be villages or hamlets, and homesteads unprotected, scattered all over the country, is the indication of security and peace. But where a country is unprotected while there are enemies all around, the people feel compelled to shut themselves up in walled towns. So it now was. Many indeed had no other homes than the holes of the rocks, the caves, the thickets or jungles, the high places, and even the pits, in which that picturesque land abounded. (1 Sam. xiii. 6). What a commentary on the statement that "sin is the reproach of any people!"—until that I Deborah arose, a mother in Israel.] Not meaning so much, as that Israel was born again as a nation through her; though it might be said that Israel recovered its nationality through her influence. But the phrase is similar to that applied to certain patriots, who on account of their noble conduct in defending and acting as protectors of their country, are called "the fathers of their country." Deborah was the deliverer of her country, and so earned the title of "a mother in Israel." (2 Sam. xx. 19). The phrase, "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem," occurs in Isa. xxii. 21. (Comp. Job xxix. 16). Queen Elizabeth was accustomed to say, she could believe nothing of her people that parents would not believe of their children.

8. They chose new gods.] Hence the loss of all their strength. The real "strength of Israel" they abandoned. "They lightly esteemed the rock of their salvation." They had no

desire for the fellowship of a holy God. They chose gods with a character like their own, gods of their own invention. Not one, but many. "The serpent's grammar first taught men to decline God plurally: "Ye shall be as gods" (*Trapp*)—"new gods"—not worshipped by their fathers. (Deut. xxxii. 17).

There was war in the gates.] They so "provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods," that He allowed the enemy to press even up to the gates of their towns, and besieged them; so that the gates, which were usually the seat of the administration of justice, became the scene of war. The word חֹרֶב means, as *Cassel* says, "not simply war, but an already victorious and consuming oppression." There was a "besieging of the gates." None went out and none came in. Quiet was completely driven out of the land. "There is no peace to the wicked." As the tide of idolatry rolled over the land everywhere, so did the flood of national misery. Resistance in the open field there was not anywhere; and even in their fortified places, the enemy kept clamouring at the gates. Their manliness had vanished; they kept skulking behind their shut gates; while outside the enemy had it all their own way, and were ever on the point of breaking through! All the bitter fruit of sin.

Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?] Not that the people *had not* any such weapons (as in 1 Sam. xiii. 22), for if so, the battle of Kishon could not have been fought. The reference is not to Barak's army, which consisted of 10,000 men. The meaning seems to be, that a spirit of trembling had so generally seized the people of Israel, that not a single man among so many as 40,000 had the courage to stand forth to fight his country's battle in the field. There were three kinds of spears, as referred to in the Old Testament. The first was a long slender lance; the second a javelin; and the third—that referred to here (*romach*), a heavier weapon.

9. Again there is a turn in the song. The transition is abrupt, as all transitions are here. There are no prefaces, and no connecting narratives. Central statements only are made. They break on the ear without warning and without comment. My heart is toward the governors of Israel,] *i.e.* is drawn to them in admiration of their conduct. "The leaders" came to the front when the call was made for volunteers to fight the Lord's battle. They had all the more merit in doing this, because on them lay the burden of the responsibility, and on them fell the brunt of the danger. Their conduct also would powerfully stimulate the rank and file. God was to be praised for this; for it was His Spirit that rested on the leaders, and put such courage and self devotion into them.

10. Speak, ye that ride on white asses, etc.] Rehearse ye, celebrate in a song of praise. *Lit. meditate ye.* Many render it, *sing.* (Comp. Ps. cxlv. 5; cv. 2). "*White spotted asses.*" There are no asses white all over, but asses with white spots. Asses in Palestine were usually of a red colour. The white spotted were highly prized on account of their beauty, and were rare, consequently were costly, and hence were used by the upper classes. (Chap. x. 4; xii. 14). Ye that sit in judgment.] Rather that sit on *carpets*, or *coverings*, some make it *sadd e-clothes*, such as are put on asses. (Matt. xxi. 7). These are the rich and prosperous. Those who walk by the way.] Those who travel on foot represent the middle and lower classes, who have to do their business without any such help. *Keil*, however, supposes three classes are referred to: the upper classes, judges and others who ride on costly animals; the rich resting at home on their splendid carpets; and the poor travellers and common people who can now go quietly along the high road again without fear of interruption from the foe The nobles, the wealthy, and the poor alike enjoyed a long-wished for security in going abroad through the country which their God had given them.

11. They that are delivered from the noise of archers, etc.] This verse has received many different renderings, which we cannot notice in detail. It seems to express a new thought, and to refer to a dreadful hardship which was daily experienced all over the land. People could not want their supplies of water, and the wells were usually situated outside the towns, so that in going to the wells there was always exposure. The enemy knowing this oftentimes planted a company of skilled archers to shoot arrows at those who came to the wells, and while in the act of drawing water many were either wounded or killed. But now such as had this duty to perform were no longer in danger. They were delivered from "the cry of the sharp-shooters," or the tumult of the archers at the places where they drew waters. And now having no fear of any sudden attack there, and of being wounded, or robbed, or carried captive, they at these spots shall henceforth be so filled with gratitude at the consciousness of their profound security, that they shall there rehearse the mighty acts of the Lord, etc. Strifes at these places were not uncommon. (Gen. xxvi. 18-21; Ex. ii. 17-19; Jer. iv. 29). "*Righteous acts,*" because they were performed in truth to His covenant, and were in themselves righteous. Then shall the people go down to the gates.] The people could leave their hiding-places in the mountains and walled towns, and return to pass through the gates to the villages and the open plains, to pursue again the peaceful work of commerce, and of carrying on the daily business of life. The victory so recently gained had cleansed the land of these marauders.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—*Verses* 1–11.

A High Starting Point and a Great Downfall.

1. God's people have songs given them to sing in the night. The times of the Judges were for the most part a night season in the history of the Church, and especially the period to which this chapter refers. But no night is so dark as to be without its stars, or so cheerless as to be without its songs in God's dealings with the children of the promises. This effusion of the person chosen for the time to represent Israel's feelings under the treatment they received at the hands of God's Providence, is hung up like a torch in the night of the national history, to revive faith and encourage hope. When passing through the waters, the river is not permitted to overflow, neither when walking through the fire, as God's people must sometimes do, is the flame allowed to kindle upon them. "Though sorrowful they are yet always rejoicing—though persecuted they are not forsaken—though cast down they are not destroyed." "When troubles abound their consolations do much more abound by Christ." They are never altogether without hope. They are saved by hope. Bunyan rightly makes his Christian sing after each trying episode of his history—after his fight with Apollyon, his getting clear of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, his deliverance from Vanity Fair, and his escape from Doubting Castle.

The Church of God, even amid the dark shadows of the Old Testament age, had her times for the use of the harp, and every instrument of joy. There was "a time to laugh as well as a time to weep." And these times would have been far more numerous, and greatly more exultant had there been more true penitence, and less relapsing into sin. But no night was so long as entirely to extinguish the hope of returning day, or so dark as to put out all the stars, or so destructive in its effects as to prevent the recovery of all that is really valuable. It is part of God's arrangement in His Providential rule over this sorrowful world, to give men songs to sing in the night, perhaps lest they should become demoralised. Though there can be no real hearty singing and thorough enjoyment without being able to say of God: "He is my God! though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away." (Job xxxv. 10.) True heart-singing in the night of trouble is exemplified in Ps. xlii., lvii., xxii., lxxvii., and cxvi.

2. The duty of keeping God's works in everlasting remembrance. The object of composing this ode was not only to make it the matter of praise on a single occasion, but especially to keep up the memory of this great deliverance to remote generations, for the honour of the Divine name. The same sentiment pervades most of the Davidic Psalms, which, as a matter of fact, have served this purpose in the past. In like manner, this song has been the means of preserving to the Church, for many generations, a most instructive chapter of God's doings *for* her, and His dealings *with* her, at a critical stage of her history. God's mighty acts are worthy of being thus remembered for many reasons:—

(1.) *They are marvellously instructive.* The two points on which, for our own benefit, it is needful to have the fullest instruction, are God's character and ways, and our own character and ways. Instruction on these points is of permanent value; and it is the light which is thrown upon these that is specially noticed in the Book of Psalms, when the writers make mention of God's mighty acts. What an instructive revelation is made of man's character as it is exhibited in the times of Deborah—the perversity of his nature in so stubbornly taking the wrong course, notwithstanding all the Divine teaching given, though

so many remonstrances were used, so many warnings given, so many chastisements up to this point inflicted. And after the cloud of vengeance had burst on these sinners, how long do they continue suffering bitterly before they will turn to Him who smites them, or acknowledge their offence! What tenacity of sin belongs to the depraved human heart! What blindness of mind and hardness of heart! What depth of alienation from God! What infatuation in "kicking against the pricks!" What daring defiance of God's authority! What desecration of His holy covenant!

On the other hand, what a revelation is given of God's long-suffering patience in dealing with this people! How long does He remain silent while they go on sinning against Him! We see Him faithfully warning, earnestly entreating, and strongly expostulating. We see Him loathe to smite at all, and for a long time the sword remains in the sheath. When at last it must come forth, it is used at first but lightly; very reluctantly the severity of the stroke is increased; but the moment that true penitence is shown, it is removed, and the penitent is dealt with as a child. Even when the sword, or rather the rod, is used most severely, it is still "in measure;" it is always to correct, and not to destroy, or make a full end. And at the very worst, we never see God renouncing His character to this people as their covenant God! This is the climax of the whole revelation of God's character made. How rich the instruction conveyed!

(2.) *They are in themselves spectacles of great beauty.* A thing of beauty is a joy for ever. And here the beauty is absolutely perfect. The eye never wearies with looking on perfection. The soul is satisfied with it, so that it can demand nothing more of excellence in the object than what it already has. All human works, however, at the very best, are only relatively perfect. There is something both on the surface and under the surface, which indicates decay, defect, or alloy. The sweetest music after a time begins to pall on the ear. The most exquisite picture does not always continue to charm the eye. Man's works, when looked at in different lights, will always present some feature of imperfection. Not so with the works of God. The most minute, even microscopical examination, will only reveal their absolute perfection more and more.

In all these redemption-works, on behalf of His people, which God wrought in the days of the Judges, what a God-like manner of working do we see in them all! How tame and vapid would they all have become if the events and means had been left in the hands of men! Have they not all a sacred touch about them, which no hand can give them but God's own? What a marvellous perpetuity of freshness belongs to everything which bears that touch! We read the tales a thousand times, and yet the interest continues fresh. The print of the Divine hand on the page preserves it so. How perfectly is every work done which God's hand undertakes to do. When that hand begins to work, how smoothly does every wheel go round to accomplish His purpose! What a complete change passes over the land in an incredibly short space of time! There is no hurry or bustle, no driving in hot haste. Everything is done calmly, with simplicity, in a way to confound human reason, but with irresistible efficacy. The most unlikely instruments are chosen to do great things. A mighty army is utterly destroyed by the strategy of a woman; and the most celebrated general of the age is brought down to the dust of death by the hand of another woman and an alien! Such efficiency can God impart to the weakest instrumentality, when it so seems good in His sight. He can make everything converge to carry out His purpose.

What a magnificent spectacle of beauty there is in the display of God's goodness to this people! How often did He pardon them! How often turn away His anger! How patient in waiting for their repentance! How long-suffering in bearing with their provocations! Each of these features is a perfect

study, and the longer each is studied the perfection of its beauty becomes more and more visible. So with the glorious display of *power* made, which is unapproachable in its grandeur. The manifestation also of *wisdom* surpasses man's power to appreciate it—of His *justice*, which is "like the great mountains"—of His *faithfulness*, which "reacheth unto the clouds"—and of His *righteousness*, which "is very high." "Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can show forth all His praise? His works are honourable and glorious: they are all done in truth and uprightness."

(3.) *They are never fully comprehended.* The thought of God's own character is something too vast for our minds to comprehend. It is not true philosophy to take no higher ground, to suppose that the human mind can adequately comprehend any of the thoughts of the Infinite mind; God alone can comprehend Himself. Hence God's plan of salvation is called "a mystery." But so difficult is it to comprehend it, that the angels of God, so remarkable for their wisdom, have been studying it with rapt interest through the whole history of time, and still have not made it out. The narrow mind of a creature never can fully grasp any of the thoughts of God. Hence He must always remain, more or less, the Unknown God. The same grand attributes of character He has so often presented to our view we have never yet fully comprehended, and never can; so that every time we come again to look at the great perfections set before us, we feel the subject is perpetually fresh, in a greater or less degree. We may be always forming larger, and still larger, conceptions of God's majesty, and every feature of His character, without ever exhausting the subject.

(4.) *They are of such vast importance to our interests.* What an infinitely valuable privilege to have this God for our God!—one so full of condescension as to come down and hold fellowship, so intimately and so freely, with men on the earth—to ally Himself so closely with them—to permit such freedom of access, and to promise to do so much in answer to humble and believing prayer! What a great possession it is for the soul of man to be able to say—the God who can do such mighty works is *my* God, in all the love of His heart, and in all the strength of His arm. Whatever else is overlooked, I cannot for a moment forget this grand truth that God is mine! God's works in the past are all pledges for the future, for those whom He begins to love He loves to the end. A record of His mighty acts is thus virtually a treasury of exceeding great and precious promises. Every good thing He has done to any of His people already is a proof that He will repeat the same favour to the same person, or to any others of His people, when they are in all respects placed in the same circumstances. His right hand never loses its power. What it was in the days of Barak it is still, and will be to the end of time. These mighty acts show what resources belong to our God, and how much we have to draw upon when an emergency arises.

3. The high starting-point of the Divine Love never to be forgotten. Ver. 4, 5. Here the prophetess looks back, as the eye of the godly Israelite was always instructed to do, to the early days of God's church, to compare what took place then with the chequered experiences of her own day. That light of the early days was already a good way in the distance, but it shone as a fixed star, an object of hope to the people of God, in all the future stages of their eventful history. There they saw the high pitch of that Love at its outset, in dealing with this people, and they were taught to regard it as the love of an unchangeable God, "whose gifts and calling are without repentance" or any change of purpose. However obscured the future manifestations of that love might be, or however mysterious it might seem in its workings, it was always a fact that it was pitched high at first. The march of that people, as the people of God, was first seen as they came over the mountains, or along the desert of Seir, and then Jehovah Himself was at their head, acknowledging them as His

own people, and showing, by mighty signs and wonders, what resources of power He was prepared to put forth on their behalf. The solid earth trembled, the heavens dropped rains, yea the clouds poured out a deluge in the arid wilderness. The mountains also melted before His step. These phenomena only are mentioned, owing to the rule of severe brevity which is observed in the text. But they are given as a specimen of what actually occurred. (See Ps. lxviii. 7-9; also Hab. iii. 12.

1. The sentiment is this, that *as that love was when it first took them by the hand, so it would ever continue to be at all future stages of their history.* The question for them to determine simply was *how high* did that love rise at its beginning—*how* did it show itself? and *to what extent* did it manifest itself? The answer is to be found in the phenomona of Sinai, when God first formally adopted them to Himself to be His people, and showed how far he was prepared to go on their behalf—how much power He kept in readiness to fulfil the promptings of His love. The great mark of His love to these children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was, that He made use of them and their history as a medium to reveal His own glorious character, in the eyes of all the nations. Their history was rendered illustrious at every step by the glimpses that were given of His glorious perfections, and from first to last He was known as the Holy One of Israel! In being thus brought so nigh to God they were raised to an unspeakable height above all other nations, so that their history at the outset read like no other history.

2. *These antecedents were never to be forgotten.* They laid the foundation of all future expectatio s. However low at any time they might sink, there was always a ground of hope, that they would sooner or later rise to the enviable height of being a people "beloved of the Lord, and dwelling safely" under the shadow of His protecting wing. "For there was none like unto the God of Jeshuran, when He rode upon the heavens in their help, and in His excellency on the sky!" Throughout the whole of the hazardous journey which He led them, when He conducted them to their future promised home, His language was, "I bare you on eagles' wings, *and brought you unto myself.*"

3. *Hence when Israel was lying among the pots*, with soiled garments, and filthiness was in all her skirts, she is yet called upon to remember Sinai and its manifold glories—the days of her youth when she stood forth as the Queen of all the nations of the earth; and, as she was in those golden days, so she was to think she might become still. So should God's people in every age act. They are to look at the terms on which God enters into covenant with all who truly repent and believe the Gospel. However low they may sink under the trials and afflictions of this life, they must never forget that they are "*the sons of God*"—and are therefore "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ"—that all which the promises of God contain is theirs—theirs by good legal right—that all the titles spoken of in the Gospel are theirs, all the privileges, all the hopes and prospects, all the immeasurable advantage of being the brethren of the Son of God, all the infinitely valuable possession of having the Holy Spirit of God to dwell in the heart as His proper home—that all these unspeakably precious things are theirs; and though concealed as yet from the eye of the world, that it will not be possible long to conceal such possessions; and when they come out, their possessor will be elevated to a throne in the heavens, and will spend a glorious life, "rejoicing with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

4. *Remember the starting-point*—is the exhortation addressed to every soul that embraces Christ as its Saviour, in all the future stages of its history. That love which redeemed you, and called you by name; which brought you out of darkness into light; which first you saw bleeding on a cross, bearing the weight of Divine, not merely human, wrath on your account, and which

procured for you the means of getting the pardon of every sin, and acceptance before God as righteous; that love which presented to you God's highest possession—His own Son in human form, that it might become your possession; that love, as you first met it, is always to be carefully remembered as the measure of the kindness which the soul may always expect to receive at the hands of the God to whom it is reconciled. When God gives Christ, He gives Himself. He becomes a God to the receiver of Christ. He opens out His glorious perfections, and says, "Having given so much in making my first gift, I will now keep back nothing." There is the fountain out of which the streams of your souls' supplies are for ever to flow. And when future and further wilderness journeys are to be made, remember the Rock you met with at the beginning of the way, and form your expectations from what you saw and experienced then. The streams may rise as high as the fountain head. Higher they do not need to rise. There will be consistency in the love that follows thee all the way; for "I am the Lord thy God *from the land of Egypt.*"

What a comforting memory for the Christian pilgrim to carry in his bosom as he pursues his weary journey, often finding "the journey to be too great for him," and "his soul much discouraged because of the way!" God never forgets the first high pitch of His love, but will from time to time go as high again in its manifestations, to prove that, notwithstanding its being occasionally obscured by clouds of sin, He yet really loves with an everlasting love.

4. The desolation produced by departure from God. Vers. 6-11. From the days of Eve and downwards, departure from God ever leads to a great fall. From that cause, how soon did every leaf in paradise wither! and how quickly did paradise itself disappear from the earth! Here the language—"they forsook the Lord"—is the constant refrain in the melancholy dirge of Israel's history. And now, through Deborah, as the mouthpiece of sinning Israel in her day, we have confession made of the terrible downfall from the most exalted prosperity to the lowest adversity, through departure from the living God. The enemy is seen coming in like a flood, and overrunning the land. The happiest land under heaven becomes the most miserable. Her tale is meant for posterity, as well as the time then passing, and she fixes the date. She writes the history of her own times—the times of her youth, but which she lived long enough, to be the means under God of changing into something bright and glorious. Distress unexampled prevailed. A weighty incubus pressed down every energy. The humiliation of sin was complete. For—

(1.) *There was no liberty.* The Israelite could not freely walk through his own country. That land, where formerly he was accustomed to sit under his vine and his fig-tree, none making him afraid, had now become his prison. "The public roads were unoccupied. They that travelled at all skulked along the by-paths." What an expressive history have we here in a single line! Those whom the Lord had made free were now become slaves. The inhabitants were deprived of the use of their country, so that all business had practically come to a stand-still. Their departure from God had led to His departure from them; and they had now to reckon on their best friend as become their most dreadful enemy. There can be no neutrality. If God is not *for* us, we will soon find He is *against* us. "If we forsake Him, He will cast us off."

(2.) *They led a life of danger.* They could not even go to the wells for water to drink. Knowing the necessity of their frequently being obliged to go there for supplies of the refreshing liquid in that land of drought, the archers planted themselves in the thickets around these wells; and it was generally at

the risk of robbery, or even death, that the precious boon could be gained. Indeed, the enemy might appear at any hour, or at any point, all over the land. From unexpected quarters he might descend without a moment's warning, like the hawk swooping down on the dove, and no safety to life or property could be relied on anywhere. It was a reign of terror. It was an enemy whose tender mercies were cruel. The old serpent that had been scotched, not killed, now reared its head, and darted its venom, against the hand that was once raised against it. Instances, indeed, were of daily occurrence to show what Canaanitish malice could do in retaliation for the past attempts which Israel made to destroy them.

When a man forsakes his God, and walks after the lust of his own heart, dangers quickly rise up around him. His cry is, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! how many rise up against me!" On the other hand, "when a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

(3.) *They led a life of degradation.* They were in the position of a people trampled down, and unable to help themselves, while no one cared to come to their assistance. When they went abroad at all, they durst not look the enemy in the face, they had to skulk along in the by-paths. They made their most innocent visits furtively. They had to snatch the most common blessings of life by stealth. If their enemies could have prevented it, they would have been deprived of the very air and light of heaven!—O, sin is a hard master! All its service is a "service with rigour." "The way of transgressors is hard."

(4.) *A stop was put to the industries of life.* Trade ceased on the public highways. There could be no commerce. Intercourse of one part of the country with another was completely blocked. The land too must have ceased to be tilled, and the ordinary harvests would be nowhere. Famine must have begun to stare them in the face. The acquisition of wealth too would be impossible, and, in the case of the great majority, the means of supporting life would be reduced to a minimum.

(5.) *There was no peaceful enjoyment of life.* "The villages" or unwalled towns ceased out of the land. Those models of peaceful homes which are scattered everywhere over our own land, whether in the valley, on the plain, or on the mountain-side, especially in sequestered districts, had one after one in that country to be forsaken, because of the ruthless assaults made on their inoffensive occupants by men of marauding instincts. Where pillage, and possibly wanton barbarities became general, it was impossible to live without protection. Hence, villages, hamlets, and country districts were deserted, and the refuge of walled towns was universally sought. The whole nation had to live *in hiding*, or shut up within walls and gates. Quietude throughout the land was destroyed. The pleasures of home-life were unknown. There was no home at home.

(6.) *There was no repose from trouble.* It was a state of perpetual alarm The enemy's grasp was on the nation's throat. "War was brought to the very gates." They had "to fight for their altars and their firesides." The enemy was a stranger to pity. The spectacles of family suffering that ever met the eye made no impression on hearts of stone; and there was no relaxation of the iron grip. From day to day, and all the year round, thus it was with poor crushed Israel, whose life was one continual moan. It was not life, but a living death. The dreams of night, and the waking realities of day, spoke only of wretchedness; while a dull leaden cloud of despair seemed to close over their national prospects for ever.

(7.) *To crown all, there was a general spirit of trembling.* The manhood was taken out of them, and no wonder. They had become a nation of cowards. There was panic everywhere. Not a single hand was raised to grasp a shield or

spear among so many as forty thousand of Israel. It was an absolute prostration of the national energies. They were chicken-hearted, crestfallen cowed and spiritless—a community of poltroons and dastards.

"The Spirit of the Lord had departed from them, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled them." To depart from the Lord and "observe lying vanities, is to forsake our own mercies." When the Lord departs from a soul, it becomes stricken with fear, and trembling seizes upon it. "The strong man becomes as tow." The mighty is "clothed with trembling." Witness the great ones from whom God has departed (1 Sam. xiii. 7; Dan. v. 6; Acts xxiv. 25). What a striking commentary does this pass of Israel's history read on the sure words of prophecy uttered, respecting the evil result of their forsaking the Lord God of their fathers! "*The Lord shall give thee a trembling heart, and sorrow of mind. Thy life shall hang in doubt before thee, and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life. In the morning thou shalt say, would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart, and for the sight of thine eyes.*"

5. **Thanksgiving for a great Deliverance.** Vers. 1-11. This is the entire purpose of the song. When the deliverance had been accomplished, "then sang Deborah," etc. And the subject of this strong heart-utterance is stated to be "to praise the Lord for the avenging of Israel"—The singer is most explicit in stating the object in view. "I will sing unto the Lord—I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel." Again she breaks out, "Bless ye the Lord." The people who are delivered "shall rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord," etc. It was customary for the sweet singers of Israel, with David in the foreground, to call on the whole people at fitting times to give thanks to the God of Israel for His great mercies to His people (Ps. cv. 1, 2; cvi. 1, 2; cvii. 1-3; cxi. 1, 2; cxviii 1-4). Indeed, the whole Book of Psalms is a prolonged exercise of thanksgiving and praise to God for mercies received, along with confession of sin, and petition for Divine blessings. Such "praise is comely" in God's redeemed ones. The merest glance at God's acts towards those whom He has delivered from sin and wrath justifies the expectation of never-ceasing gratitude. "While I live I will praise the Lord; I will sing praises to my God while I have any being." The obedience of the Christian life, as regards means, springs entirely from this source; for it is out of gratitude for the great blessings of redemption, so freely and richly bestowed, that every believer runs in the ways of new obedience The gratitude shown here was genuine and acceptable to God, because:—

(1.) *It was spontaneous.* It was not required by any command given, but it came unbidden from hearts overflowing with thankful feelings for the mercies received. This spontaneous character of the thanksgiving made it come up as a savour of sweet incense unto the Lord; for gratitude, if not a free-will offering, is nothing. In the present case, it was full-hearted and fresh; it was warm and enthusiastic; it was suitable for the occasion, and thoroughly natural. It was altogether up to the mark; for the heart comes out in every line, and, though more than three thousand years have passed since this anthem was first sung, it seems as fervid and glowing as if it had been sung but yesterday.

(*a*). *Nature of gratitude.* Gratitude is love responding to love. *It is the magnetism of love.* When a generous heart magnetises another heart with something of its own nature, the effect comes out in the form of gratitude,

> "Which makes each generous impulse of our nature,
> Warm into ecstasy."

It is the offspring of goodness; the acknowledgment of love's conquests; the homage which the heart presents at the footstool of loving kindness. It is something more excellent than ordinary obedience. The atter is virtue in the

positive degree; gratitude is the same in the superlative degree of comparison. In ordinary obedience, the will is tranquil and moderate in its action; in gratitude, it is enthusiastic and overflowing.

(*b*). *Hence the superior excellence of the kind of obedience which the gospel of Christ produces.* No obedience is so free, for it springs entirely from the heart's own promptings. None is so powerful, for it has in it the full force of the will. None is so unconstrained, for it needs no command to call it forth. None is so sure in its action, for it is instinctive and irrepressible. None is so living and buoyant, for the deepest and finest strings of the soul are touched, and the highest electric life, of which it is susceptible, is elicited. Hence no offerings are more acceptable to God than the outpourings of grateful hearts. This is the kind of worship rendered in heaven by the redeemed ones before the throne; and no incense is so grateful and precious, as the boundless gratitude which every one of that vast company expresses in honour of the Redeemer's name. Even among fellowmen nothing is more pleasant to receive than genuine gratitude;

> "Sweet is the breath of vernal shower
> The bees' collected treasures sweet,
> Sweet music's melting fall, but sweeter yet
> The still small voice of gratitude."

(2). *It was religious.* This is something far deeper than patriotism. That Deborah and Barak with all the willing-hearted volunteers whom they led were sterling patriots, we cannot for a moment doubt. The very dust of their country was dear to them, and had that been the only impulse under which they acted, everyone in his place would, we believe, have well earned the reputation of a hero. But they felt they were fighting for the cause of their God on the earth, and the promotion of His glory in the eyes of the nations, much more than their country's renown, was the motive that stirred their hearts. Deeper was the patriotism of the Jew than the representative of any other nationality, for his country was a gift specially bestowed by the hand of his God in token of very peculiar favour (Gen. xvii. 4-8). It was therefore a sacred land, and on it the Divine blessing was supposed continually to rest, unless in so far as it might be prevented by the people's sins. It was the chosen theatre for the display of the Divine perfections on the earth. It was occupied by God's church—the people with whom He was in covenant relationship as His own people. It was therefore "God's own land." (Ps. lxxxv. 1; lxxix. 1). It was a "Holy Land." The patriotism of the Israelite therefore had necessarily much of the religious element in it, in a manner and on grounds, which the member of no other nation had. Yet it was ever the glory of the Divine name, to which the true people of God had regard, as that which was most dear to them in all the anxieties they cherished, and in all the sacrifices they made. Their thanksgiving was strictly a religious act.

(3). *It proceeded from a due sense of the magnitude of the favour shown.*—Knowledge to appreciate the excellence of the Divine blessings, and the loving-kindness of God in bestowing them, is ever regarded in Scripture as a root principle of religious character. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." (Ps. lxiv. 9; cxi. 2; xxxiv. 8). It is set forth as one of the chief barriers to all real improvement, that the professing people of God were so often "a people of no understanding—sottish children—my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Comp. Ps. lxxiii. 20, 21; xciv. 7-10; xxxii. 8, 9; lxxviii. 34, 35, also 11, 42; and Isa. xi. 3).

That the faithful Israelites fully appreciated the value of the Divine favour shown them in this deliverance appears in the whole character of the effusion. This is proved indeed by the very fact, that it should have been determined to hand down the memory of the event in the form of a national ode to be sung to

latest generations. The stirring nature of the composition too shows not only a state of warmth, but even of exultation. Such appreciative worship is in the highest degree glorifying to God. They regarded this deliverance as :—

(*a*). *Coming from God's own hand.* The nation was so spirit broken, that no thought of resistance arose among the people themselves. The idea of raising a breakwater, to the over-running flood came from Deborah, and to her as a prophetess of the Lord, it was communicated by the God into whose ear so many penitential confessions on the one hand, and cries for help on the other, came up. "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." It was His Spirit that rested on Deborah, and that passed from Deborah to Barak—and from these again, first to the princes, and then to all the willing ones among the people. The scheme of obtaining emancipation by means of a battle was of the Lord. The proclamation to assemble for the fight was His—the place of rendezvous was of His appointment, and the rule to be followed in selecting soldiers for the army, in choosing only the willing-minded, was expressly ordered by Him. The spirit of dauntless courage and assured confidence of success, which animated the little army of Barak, was infused into them by Him ; while the mighty forces of nature which awoke so suddenly, and so marvellously, against the formidable host of Sisera, producing an absolute panic among their ranks, were all arrayed against them by the God of Israel. Thus it ever is with the truly pious. They see God's wisdom planning and directing, and God's hand controlling and bending all things to carry out His own mind and will. And to Him, in every event, they ascribe all the praise.

(*b*). *They regarded it as most unexpected.* "If the Lord should open the windows of heaven, might such a thing be?" Nothing seemed more remote from all bounds of possibility than the lifting up of the heavy incubus which now pressed on the hearts and shoulders of the people. The population generally must have been terribly thinned (ver. 13), and the male population appear to have been degraded to the condition of slaves, while all spirit of heroism seemed to have died out in Israel. It was a sky full of dull leaden clouds, and not a rift could be seen anywhere to relieve the gloom.

(*c*). *They felt it was most opportune.* Things were going from bad to worse. It was impossible that the energies of the nation could much longer bear the strain to which they were put. When all commerce had disappeared, and the fields had practically ceased to be tilled ; when the whole people were shut up as prisoners within walled towns, or lived in hiding among rocks and caves, with the most precarious means of subsistence, it was inevitable that starvation should soon have come over all the homes of Israel. The sands of the national glass were fast running out, and that once mighty people, before whom all the nations of Canaan fell, were on the verge of becoming extinguished, through the want of the means of subsistence, and the savage cruelties of an iron-hearted tyrant. "*If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now might Israel say, when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick when their wrath was kindled against us ; the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul ; then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler.*"

(*d*). *They realised it as most complete.* The defeat of Sisera was not only a rout—it was a ruin. The elements of nature were awakened against them in such fury, that it was impossible for them for a moment to stand their ground. It was as if the chaff should try to make headway against the whirlwind. They fell before the sword of Barak and his heroes as sheep decoyed to the slaughter. It became proverbial in the songs of Israel to say, "Do to them as to Sisera, as to Jabin at the brook of Kishon ; who perished at Endor ; they became as dung for the earth." "The river of Kishon swept them away. That ancient river—

the river Kishon." The result of this overthrow was not only to weaken perceptibly the power of the oppressor, but absolutely to extinguish it. The sky of Israel was cleared in a single day. Not a cloud—not a speck—remained. Israel was free as on the day when they stood on the farther shores of the Red Sea and saw the Egyptians, their oppressors, dead on the strand. "The Lord's work is a perfect work."

(*e*). *This deliverance was reckoned invaluable.* It not only put a stop to the pining away of the nation, and acted as a balm to their patriotic feelings, but it preserved the existence of the only people in all the earth, that were worshippers of the true God, and bore witness to His name among the nations. Had that people been swept away, the whole earth would have presented an unrelieved spectacle of idol worship. Degenerate as Israel had become, there was still a remnant among them who "*feared the Lord and thought upon His name.*" For the sake of the few He would not destroy the many. Also, the system of sanctuary service, which had been established among this people, still continued, though greatly neglected and overlapped with many incongruities. It was of vital importance to preserve that system. And of the utmost consequence it was to keep up a channel, by which God's truth and God's promises might be handed down to latest generations. Thus the gratitude of these pious singers sprung from a due appreciation of the greatness of the mercy shown by this deliverance.

(4.) *It was a voluntary tribute of the heart's love.* There was no constraint put on any one to get up such an effusion as this. No command was issued. It rose unbidden from hearts that felt it to be a relief to pour out their feelings in thanksgiving. Every singer seemed to say, "*Bless the Lord, O, my soul; and all that is within me bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O, my soul, and forget not all His benefits.*" "*My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips—I will praise Thee with my whole heart. I will remember Thy wonders of old; I will meditate on all Thy works and talk of Thy doings.*" "*How excellent is Thy loving kindness, O God! How precious are Thy thoughts to me. How great is the sum of them,*" etc. And again he says, "*I will praise Thee among the people; I will sing unto Thee among the nations. For Thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Remember the marvellous works that He hath done—His wonders and the judgments of His mouth.*" "*I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice and my supplication. Blessed be my rock; the God of my salvation be exalted.*" "*She loved much; for to whom much is forgiven the same loveth much.*"

(5.) *It was the confession of a deep obligation.* The people of that day felt it was as life from the dead to have so great a deliverance wrought for them. Between the murky gloom of the midnight sky, and the brightness of noon day the contrast was not greater, than the changed face of things produced by the destruction of the oppressor, from what the land groaned under before. All that realised it seemed prepared to say: "*What shall we render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards us? Who remembered us in our low estate, for His mercy endureth for ever; and redeemed us from our enemies, for His mercy endureth for ever!*" "*O Lord, I am thy servant; truly I am thy servant—thou hast loosed my bonds.*" "*I will publish with the voice of thanksgiving and tell of all His wonderful works.*" "*We will bless the Lord from this time forth, and for evermore.*" "*I will mention the loving kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and His great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He hath bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His loving kindnesses.*"

Remarks. 1. Gratitude is often at a great discount. One says: "We write

our blessings on the water, but our distresses on the rock." "There was a little city and few men within it; and there came a great king against it and besieged it, and built bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor, wise man, who by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man." As the Dead Sea drinks in the Jordan, and is never the sweeter, and as the ocean receives all the rivers, yet is never the fresher; so men receive the river of God's daily mercies, and yet remain entirely insensible of them, and ungrateful for them. The heath in the desert needs rain far more than the water-lily. But let the showers come down upon the heath—there is no motion, no sign that the shower is welcomed, or is working. On the other hand, the moment the rain begins to fall on the water-lily, though it is rooted in water, and has its chief element in it, its leaves seem to be clapping their hands, and the whole plant rejoices in the falling of the rain.

2. **Necessity of constant thanksgiving.** It was a beautiful tradition among the Jews: That when God created the world, He asked the angels what they thought of the work of His hands. One of them replied, that it was so vast and so perfect, that only one thing was wanting to it, namely, that there should be created a clear, mighty, and harmonious voice, which should fill all the quarters of the world incessantly with its sweet sound, day and night, to offer up thanksgiving to its Maker for His incomparable blessings. "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." "Give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God." Ps. cxlv. 2; xxxv. 28; lxxi. 8, 15, 24; cxvi. 2; civ. 33; xxxiv. 1; lxxxi. 6.

3. **Manner of showing gratitude.** "A rich youth in Rome had suffered from a dangerous illness. On recovering his health, his heart was filled with gratitude, and he exclaimed, 'O thou all-sufficient Creator! could man recompense, thee, how willingly would I give thee all my possessions!' Hermas, the herdsman, heard this, and said to the rich youth, 'All good gifts come from above; thither thou canst send nothing. Come, follow me.' He took him to a hut where was nothing but misery and wretchedness. The father lay on a bed of sickness, the mother wept, the children were destitute of clothing, and crying for bread. Hermas said, 'See here an altar for the sacrifice; see here the Lord's brethren and representatives.' The youth assisted them bountifully; and the poor people called him an angel of God. Hermas smiled and said, 'Thus turn always thy grateful countenance, first to heaven and then to earth.'" [*Krummacher.*]

4. **The true spirit of gratitude.** Two elements especially enter into this spirit. The one is to have *low thoughts of one's self*. This was exemplified by Jacob when he said, "I am less than the least of all thy mercies." The other is to realise, that as guilty creatures, *we deserve wrath not favours*. (1 Tim. i. 12–16.) A mind that is educated to gratitude, and has become healthfully sensitive to manifestations of the Divine goodness thus expresses itself:—

> "When all thy mercies, O my God,
> My rising soul surveys,
> Transported with the view I'm lost,
> In wonder, love and praise."

"Looking in through the patched, broken window of an humble cabin one day, a minister saw a poor gray-haired, bent son of toil, at a rude table, with hands raised to God, and his eyes fixed on some crusts of bread with a cup of water, in all humility and contentment exclaiming. This, and Jesus Christ too! This, and Jesus Christ too!" [*Guthrie.*]

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 1–11.

I. No memorials are really lasting, but such as are erected to the glory of God.

1. Monuments in honour of human daring when the purpose is pure and noble, as in the case of the patriot, or in honour of great and noble deeds which benefit human society, or which reveal virtues that belong to the social life of man with man, have their place, and are universally held to be worthily reared. Yet how few even of these go down through the centuries! With regard to the mass of the great ones of the earth, who have earned distinction at the hands of their fellow mortals, it is by an extravagant figure of speech that they are said to be immortalised. The verdict of the really immortal book holds good, "all the glory of man is as the flower of grass." Monuments of every kind erected by the hand of man, whether by kings or princes, to immortalise themselves, or by communities for the glory of distinguished citizens, gradually crumble under touch of the hand of time, so that not only are many swept entirely away, but those reared in the past which still survive, are found only in a state of ruins. They do not serve the purpose so much of commemorating glory, as that of intimating that the glory is departed.

2. These monuments were fading memorials of subjects of fading interest. They all belong to the category of man's relations to his fellow man, and therefore must be limited in duration. Man himself is short-lived, and necessarily his aureola must soon fade.

"For what is Life? An hour-glass on the run,
A mist retreating from the morning sun,
A busy, bustling, still-repeated dream.
It's length! A minute's pause, a moment's thought.
And happiness? A bubble on the stream
That in the act of seizing shrinks to nought."

It is only when man begins to work, or to live for the glory of God, that he becomes really immortal, and that his fame, as well as himself, live for ever. God will not give His glory to another, and He will see to it, that, under His providence, all the glory of man shall sooner, or later be abased.

3. But the ode of Deborah and Barak must live. Its object is not merely to record the stirring events of the battlefield, or to celebrate the heroism of the actors themselves; it is not to speak of stars and medals or fresh titles of distinction conferred on the handful of heroes that poured down from Mount Tabor when the signal was given. But that which imparts a deathless interest to this song, and merits for it a place on the page of the national history to latest generations, is, that here we have another proof of God's covenant love to His people, a fresh illustration of His faithful shepherd care in watching over their interests, His jealousy in saving them from the hand of the enemy, and His making use of the events of their history anew to illustrate the glory of His own name in all the earth. These considerations raise the subject of this song to an elevation far above that which belongs to the most famous battlefields of ancient history. The names of the mighty captains that led the hosts of Egypt, or Assyria, or Babylon, or Persia to battle, are already for the most part in oblivion, while the far humbler names of Deborah and Barak are engraven for everlasting remembrance in the Book of God, and shall not grow dim while sun and moon endure.

4. This ode also has a connection with the coming Messiah. The deliverance here celebrated was literally a redemption of the church of God from the consequences of her sins. It was one of many deliverances which God wrought out for His church, as preliminaries to the glorious and eternal redemption which the Messiah

was to accomplish for that church when He should appear in "the fulness of time." It was the kindling of a new light in the firmament of Israel's history, the appearance of an additional star in the dark night, to keep alive hope in the heart of the desponding church, a star which would shine on till it brought in Messiah's day.

II. God's dealings with His Church are worthy of the widest publicity.

A place is given to this song in the only book in the world which God acknowledges to be His, and the circulation of which is destined to cover the earth as the waters cover the seabed. It shall, therefore, become known through this song to the inhabitants of the whole world down to the end of time, what great things God did for His people in this age of great declension and suffering. And this is ever the wish of the Lord of the church, to glorify Himself in the eyes of the world by means of His church, for even "unto principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." What took place in this dark and distant age, though but a fragment of history, becomes of the greatest importance, when looked at as a link in the chain of God's dealings with His Church. It repeats, in the background, the story of the Divine faithfulness and love, which is elsewhere exhibited so conspicuously in the brighter pages of the church's history. It shows that His Church is loved by Him in all stages of its history, that "His work in it and towards it is honourable and glorious," that "He is ever mindful of His covenant, and in due time sends redemption to His people." The history of God's dealings with His Church hangs together as a whole, and the same principles of truth and righteousness are conspicuous in every part.

III. Sin terrible weakens all that give way to it.

Israel had now for many years been a spectacle to the world of a people that had been forsaken of their God. How completely had the strength gone out of the nation! It was as if a paralysis had seized upon it, and every faculty had become inert; or as if a giant, with brawny arms and muscular limbs, had sunk down to the diminutive form of a sickly dwarf. That which had been a Samson among the nations was now shorn of its locks. All that have to do with sin become terribly weakened, for—

1. *God's frown is upon such* FROM WITHOUT. The external aspect of His Providence, sooner or later, is against them, for sin must always bring the frown of the Ruler of Providence. That frown may find expression in a thousand ways. For all the *creatures* are in God's hand, and He can move them at will to act, consciously or unconsciously, the part of enemies to those who are the objects of His displeasure. When a man's ways displease the Lord, He can make even his bosom friends to be at enmity with him. He can put a lion in his path, and should he flee from the lion, He has a bear ready to meet him, or if he go into the house, and lean his hand on the wall, He commands the serpent to bite him. When David sinned, God raised up enemies round about him "like bees," and as numerous and as wasp-like in their nature (Ps. iii. 1; cxviii. 11, 12). When Solomon sinned, his powerful kingdom was rent in twain (1 Kings xi. 9–13); and adversaries were raised up against him, notwithstanding all his prosperity (1 Kings xi. 14, 23, 26).

Events too are turned against the sinner. Loose as events seem to hang on one another, they are yet all linked together in a chain, and even heathen poets tell us that the highest link of that chain is fastened to Jupiter's chair—that the chain may wave and shake this way or that way, but that the hand that holds it is steady, and the eye that guides it is infallible. The brightest prospects of the sinner may end in disappointment; his most skilfully-laid plans may be defeated; and all his prosperity may be turned

into adversity, by a single turn of the wheel. God will set His face against that man, and follow him for evil, and not for good. When "*he flees from the iron weapon, the bow of steel shall strike him through. The gin shall take him by the heel, and the robber shall prevail against him. Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and shall drive him to his feet. His strength shall be hunger-bitten, and destruction shall be ready at his side.*" He puts snares in all his mercies, crosses in all his comforts, and, in the expressive language of Scripture, "*curses his blessings.*" "There is no peace for the wicked." (Ps. xxxvii. 1, 2; Isa. xlv. 9.)

2. *God takes away the sources of their strength* FROM WITHIN. When God fights against a man it is not only in the way of meeting him outwardly face to face, but He also attacks him equally and more formidably *from within.* He dries up the sinews of his strength; He takes courage out of his heart and nerve out of his arm. He goes close up to the rebel and attacks him at the very seat of his strength. When He fought against Pharaoh and his host, He not only opposed them with the waters of the Red Sea, but He "pulled off their chariot-wheels, so that they drove them heavily."

Israel had now become "*a silly dove without heart.*" Its strength was emasculated. When they went out to battle against the enemy, not only were all the circumstances and accidents of the occasion turned against them by the overruling of Divine Providence, but their resources within themselves were withdrawn — their spirit of heroism, their skill in devising expedients, and their harmony of action. A spirit of poltroonery seized upon them; their princes became as children, and the men of might did not find their hands. God whispered to conscience, His vice-gerent in the the soul, and they were pursued with terrors, even as the dried leaves are tossed by the wind. When their stalwart foes met them in the field, they fell, as if the rock on which they leaned were taken away from behind them, and they were swept away by the resistless fury of the hostile wave (Deut. xxviii. 64, 65).

3. *Examples of the weakening effects of sin.* When *Israel* took of the "accursed thing" they began to flee before their enemies. When *Samson* sinned, his locks were shorn and his strength went from him. *Ahab,* though an absolute monarch upon the throne, yet felt himself weak, and the nation brought to the brink of ruin, because of his vile idolatries. Though ably succoured by the energetic Jezebel, he yet felt himself so weak, that he durst not lift a finger, or move his tongue, against the one man that stood forth to vindicate the character of Jehovah. When *Gehazi* treacherously took the money and raiment of Naaman to the dishonour of Israel's God, he became enfeebled for life, for he went out from the prophet's presence a leper white as snow. When *Saul* disobeyed the commandment of the Lord, notwithstanding his goodly appearance and his first successes, he began to show a quaking heart in face of the formidable Philistines. Before Goliath he was dismayed and greatly afraid. After shedding much innocent blood, and wickedly thirsting to take the life of the son of Jesse, though divinely anointed to occupy the throne of Israel, his terrors so increased, as his sins increased, that he abjectly submits to ask guidance in his dilemma from a woman with a familiar spirit, and finally he rushes on to the commission of suicide. When King *Herod* had barbarously murdered the holy man of God, peace forsook his pillow, and the victim of his violence ever floated before his eyes, as a spectre of which he could not get quit, so that when he heard of Jesus he said, "It is not Jesus—it is John, risen from the dead!" though, being a Sadducee, he believed in no resurrection. When *the band of soldiers* from the priests and scribes came to take Jesus, at the slightest whisper of His voice they "went backward and fell to the ground."

IV. Dark nights are followed by

bright mornings in the history of God's people.

At the beginning of God's dealings with His people, we are told that "*God heard their groaning* (under Pharaoh), *and remembered His covenant.*" This is the secret of all that is peculiar in the Divine dealings with them. Here we find a differentiating principle. Other nations were left one by one to perish. This nation, after many a dark night, has always a morning of joy to succeed it. They have no thorns without roses; no tears shed without being followed by smiles. Threatenings are indeed fulfilled, but promises are also remembered. When the tempest has blown hard for a while, the sky again clears up, and the sun shines with wonted warmth and splendour. The life of the people of God in this world is thus a perpetual paradox, as set forth in 2 Cor. iv. 8–10; and vi. 8–10. For

1. *There are reasons for joy as well as sorrow.* They are a redeemed people, and the price is Christ's precious blood. If their sins deserve the severest marks of the Divine displeasure, the great fact is always present before God, that for them an atonement has been made, and these very sins have already been punished for on a substitute. While the evil desert of the *sins* must be made manifest to their own eye, and in their bitter experience, the fulness of *the Divine satisfaction* found in the atonement made for them must also be impressed on them in their happy experience. The blood of His own Son is sprinkled upon them; therefore they are sacred and cannot be dealt with as refuse or castaways.

2. *He has expressly promised to return to them in love when they repent.* Many assurances are given to this effect throughout the whole of the prophecies. (Jer. iii. 12-15; xxx. 18-20; also, 8, 9; Hos. xiv. 1-5; Joel ii. 12-20).

3. *They are brought into endearing relations to God.* God will sometimes show that He regards them with a Father's affection. "He will not be always wroth," lest it should be supposed either that they are less loved than hated, or, that if once they were beloved, they are so now no longer. They are His children; they bear His image, however imperfectly brought out it is; they are His inheritance; they are the brethren of His Son, and "joint heirs" with that Son of all that belongs to the common Father. He cannot, therefore be *always* showing His anger towards them. (Ps. ciii. 9, etc).

4. *A continual turning of the back would be more than they could bear* "He remembered that they were but flesh," etc., and "being full of compassion, He forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not." (Ps. lxxviii. 38, 39, and Isa. lvii. 16).

5. *All their nights are destined soon to end in day.* Whatever clouds belong to their history shall pass over their heads in time. Not one shall darken their sky in the world beyond. It is indeed needful so long as sin remains, that they should drink of the waters of Marah, and that sometimes they should "go mourning without the sun;" but it is not seemly, that they should never be allowed to taste of the first fruits of the land of promise, while travelling through the wilderness on to the promised rest. It must be seen that they are the beloved of God, destined to sing and to shine for ever, and therefore objects so tenderly dealt with, that a kind voice must now and again break through the dark clouds saying, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." If the "days of their mourning shall soon be ended," we may expect that some rifts will occasionally be seen in the clouds, to show that it is not a settled rain of sorrows which now falls upon them, but that soon there will be a breaking up, to be followed by a sunshine that shall last for ever.

CHAPTER V.—*Verses* 12–22.

THE THANKSGIVING SONG.—*Continued.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—12. Awake, awake, Deborah, etc.] Having adverted in the above paragraph to the high pitch of prosperity, which Israel might naturally claim, as the nation of Jehovah—to what it had guiltily lost—and to what, through God's covenant mercy, had been won back, the singer now addresses herself to the thrilling history connected with the regaining of this prosperity, and the vast importance to the cause of God of the remarkable success achieved.

First, she is careful that her spirit be raised to the proper pitch, while engaged in celebrating so lofty a theme. She calls on her soul to bestir itself, to brace up every faculty, to shake off drowsiness, and sing with morning freshness and vigour the inspiring theme of the deliverance of God's Church. Parallel expressions are found in Ps. ciii. 1, 2; cviii. 2; lvii. 8; Isa. li. 9, 10. It is in a somewhat similar strain that our great epic bard begins one of the loftiest songs of all time,

> "Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world, and all our woe—
> Sing heavenly muse— . . .
> . . . . what in me is dark
> Illumine; what is low, raise and support."

It implies the consciousness, on the part of the author, of the greatness of the theme before him, and his desire to have his spirit elevated to the highest degree, while attempting to do justice to his task. Deborah wished to sing not only with gratitude, but with enthusiasm.

Arise Barak, and lead thy captivity captive.] While Deborah was the real head of the movement, and gave directions in all that was to be done, it was Barak's part to take the field, and deal with the enemy. The call is significantly given, not to fight, but to lead captive his prisoners—seize tokens of triumph. For, in fact, it was not so much a fight that was given Barak to do, as a *pursuit*. The victory was gained by the God of battles; "the Lord is gone out before thee." Barak's work was merely to gather the fruits. To take prisoners was always regarded as humiliating to the other camp, and a sign of complete triumph to the conqueror. (Num. xxi. 1; lxviii. 18).

The singer next proceeds, in *section second*, to speak of the actors engaged in this conflict, and of the terrible nature of the conflict itself. In the *first strophe* (vers. 13-15), she holds up to honour those, who, at all risks, came forward, to fight the battle of their God. In *strophe second* of this section (vers. 16-18), she marks out for reprobation those who refused to take part in the struggle, from considerations of what was agreeable to flesh and blood. And in *strophe third*, she graphically describes the battle itself (vers. 19-22), ending in complete victory for the people of God. And *section third* winds up the whole with two animated and sublime stanzas, containing a blessing on her who destroyed the leader of the enemy's host, and describing the bitter disappointment about to fall on that leader's home.

It is not wonderful that much diversity of opinion should exist, as to the correct rendering of the text, and the interpretation of the meaning. The style is singularly abrupt and sententious, and the construction is highly elliptical. It is also to be remembered that the Hebrew language, though terse and forcible in expression, in the use of such words as it has, is yet greatly defective in compass and fulness, compared with languages of more mature growth, such as the Greek or the English. Hence the want of precision in fixing the cases of nouns, and the moods and tenses of verbs, also the force of prepositions, of prefixes and affixes, and indeed the exact reading of the text. The same word, too, has often some difference of meaning in one connection from what it has in another. In addition to these general considerations, there are difficulties peculiar to this ode. The account given is of the most condensed character. There are no prefatory statements, no connecting sentences, no filling up of the picture. Of subsidiary matter there is none; and only a few leading strokes are given to bring out the salient features of the scenes described, from which details are left to be inferred. It is therefore only approximately that we can arrive at an accurate reading or correct interpretation.

13. Then he made him that remaineth have dominion, etc.] It is difficult to make a good sense out of the translation given in our A.V. The meaning depends on the rendering we give to the word יָרַד, which our translators make to be "have dominion," deriving it from רָדָה, to rule. But two strong reasons are against this acceptation. A word exactly similar, occurring in verse 14, is translated "came down;" and this agrees with the stream of thought in the paragraph, which describes, not the result of the battle, but rather the mustering of the combatants: dominion as yet was not gained over the enemy. There is also good reason to believe the word יָרַד, pointed as a perfect, is really the word used here, which signifies "went down."

The verse will then read, "*Then* (at that time, on that occasion—as if the speaker were addressing future listeners) *came down* (rushed down from Mount Tabor) *the remnant* (those who had escaped—the small number left after the waste of life for twenty years) *towards the mighty ones of the people* (the haughty oppressors, as in Ps. cxxxvi. 18, "famous kings"): *Jehovah* (Himself) *came down for me* (for my help) *against the powerful* (*i.e.*, the renowned heroes in Sisera's army)." The singer regards herself as entrusted with the guiding of the great movement, and speaks as the responsible party. It was only a handful of men that rushed down from the Mount, where they had assembled, to throw themselves on the serried ranks of the foe, and they did so at Deborah's call. They had confidence in her as commissioned by God, and hazarded their lives in fighting with men of superior strength, when she gave the call. This fact is first stated in the account given of the battle. Next, we are told how this handful was made up.

14. Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek, etc.] The prophetess is glad to be able to say that her own tribe was well represented. Read—"*from out of Ephraim came those whose root is in Amalek*"—referring probably to the spot called "the Mount of the Amalekites" (chap. xii. 15). For while the larger body of that people occupied the Sinaitic wilderness, another smaller wave of them moved from the Ararat district westward towards central Canaan, of which we have indications in Gen. xiv. 7.; Jud. iii. 13; xii. 15. The tradition is, that they once possessed a certain stronghold in Canaan, of which a portion of the Ephraimites dispossessed them, and settled down in their place. From this circumstance they got a name for bravery, and were known as the men who settled down in Mount Amalek. **After thee, Benjamin.]** Following behind, and in brotherhood with thee; Benjamin, though small (chap. xx.), sent a contingent. **Out of Machir came governors.]** Machir was Manasseh's eldest son, or, as some think, his only son; and so his name is applied to the tribe. But it is the Cis-Jordanic, or west side of the Jordan portion of the tribe, that is referred to here. The Trans-Jordanic portion occupied the country of Gilead, and so are called by that name, along with the tribe of Gad, with whom they usually acted (verse 17). The gist of the statement appears to be, that this half-tribe sent its best men. **Out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer.]** Rather, *those that handle the staff of the military officer, i.e.*, those who keep the muster-roll of the army—who superintend the recruiting of the troops, and the calling over of their names. These officials seem to have been known under the name of "*scribes*," and occupied a very high position in the State, so few in those days apparently being qualified to perform their duties (2 Kings xxv. 19; 2 Chron. xxvi. 11; 2 Kings xix. 2).

15. And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah, etc.]—*in* Issachar, not *of*. The meaning may be, that while Barak led on the forces of Zebulun and Naphtali, out of whom his army principally was taken, the princes in Issachar put themselves at the head of the men of their own tribe, and stood shoulder to shoulder with Barak—even Issachar, and also Barak]—the two acting together—going abreast into the valley—with Deborah]—*on her side*. *Cassel*, however, supposes that the word בֶּן is not here to be taken as the adverb, but as the noun, and renders it, not "as *also* Barak," but was "*the base*, or pedestal of Barak." True, the territory of Issachar supplied the space for the battle-ground. It was also the chief support of Barak, or rather was among the foremost in the fight, or they may have mustered more strongly than others, the enemy encamping in their own fields But this interpretation, though possible, does not seem so natural and simple as the other. **He was sent on foot into the valley.]** Supported by Issachar and its princes he was sent, etc. The original word is much stronger than simply "*was sent*' שֻׁלַּח (Puhal) has the force of *was shot*, as an arrow from the bow—referring, as *Cassel* says, to "the storm-like rapidity of Barak's movements." Either they were instigated by Deborah to rush with impetuosity into the valley (or rather the plain), or, being impelled by their own enthusiasm, they so rushed (Job xviii. 8).

At the close of ver. 15 begins an account of the laggards and cowards, in this great day of decision. **For the divisions of Reuben, there were great thoughts of heart.]** This is often taken to mean: on account of the divided counsels, and the consequent heart-burnings and party strifes which prevailed in the tribe of Reuben, there were many anxious thoughts and much concern experienced. But this interpretation is not justified by the word here used, פְּלַגּוֹת. When that word is translated *divisions*, it signifies divisions into *classes* or ranks, or division of a whole into its parts, and not by any means division of heart thoughts, or heart purposes. We do not know from this word, whether there was variance or discord in this tribe or not. The proper rendering of the original word is *at the brooks of Reuben* (Job xx. 17; Ps. i. 3), there were great *resolutions* of heart formed, not merely *thoughts*. They would do great things—they would go in a body to the war; they would not be behind their brethren, nor would they forsake them; they would stand firm in the hour of danger; as became the tribe of the eldest brother, they would set an example to be followed by all the others—with many such thoughts. The country of Reuben possessed rich pasturage, and, lying as it did between the hills to the East of Jordan and the river itself, it naturally abounded in springs and streams. Hence it was natural to speak of them as sitting by their brooks, or small streams. At first they seemed to be loud in their professions of zeal and resolved to do great things. It was easy to do so by the water-courses, sitting at ease, with

nothing to make them afraid. But as they continued to think over the matter, and the many dangers and sacrifices they would have to make, by joining in the war, came more fully into view, they began to hesitate, and at length preferred to remain quietly at home following their comfortable pastoral pursuits.

16. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds]—the enclosures made of hurdles, in which, during summer, the flocks are kept by night. The dual number is used because the folds of this sort were divided into *two* parts of the different kinds of flock" (Gen. xlix. 14). *Keil* gives the spirit of the passage thus: "Why didst thou remain in the comfortable repose of a shepherd's life, to hear the bleatings of the flocks—or the piping of the shepherds, instead of the blast of the war-trumpets!"—The word translated "great searchings of heart," does not refer to close *self-examination* as to the state of their hearts, to find out secret or indwelling sins, but rather denotes anxious ponderings or *deliberations*, as to the decision to which they should come. They perplexed themselves how they could both preserve a name for loyalty to their God, and yet save themselves from the hazard and self-sacrifice of plunging into the war. They racked their brains to make the best possible compromise. There was a sifting of all possible ways of deciding, so as to preserve their ease and comfort on the one hand, while yet they floated high the banner of allegiance to Jehovah on the other—a class of religious professors that has been numerous in all ages. To make high professions without standing firmly by them, was Reuben's character from the beginning. "Unstable as water thou shalt not excel." This interpretation corresponds with the call of the prophetess, chiding them for their want of decision.

17. Gilead abides beyond Jordan, etc.] Gilead was the grandson of Manasseh, and represented the portion of the tribe that lay beyond Jordan. Hence the charge of neutrality here referred to, is brought against the half-tribe of Manasseh to the East of Jordan, and also the tribe of Gad; both tribes being always closely associated together, probably owing to their common love for pastoral pursuits. They both occupied the country of Gilead. The use of the present tense in these verses makes the picture more vivid. The poetess describes it, as if she saw the scenes passing before her eye at the moment of writing. It is put down to the dishonour of the two tribes mentioned, that they took no part in the war. The same is said of Dan and Asher. Why did Dan remain in ships? *Why does Dan tarry in ships? i.e.* carrying on his usual trade. Dan had a sea-board of some considerable value. though it was very limited. It seems to have included Joppa, which was then, and long after, a place of considerable value. (Josh. xiv. 46; also Ezra iii. 7; 2 Chron. ii. 16). They perhaps traded with the Phœnicians, many of whom would probably be in Sisera's army; and they would not care to quarrel with their customers, in case it might hurt their trade—a miserable policy!—for, by failing to assist their brethren, they undermined their own security and freedom, in allowing the enemy to be successful. They thought only of their own gains—or, as *Trapp* puts it, "they cared only to dress up their own cabins, when the whole ship was in danger." Asher sits still by the sea-shore, and abides by his breaches]. He reposes securely in his *creeks*, and *river-mouths*. He will not leave his comfortable home on the Mediterranean. (Josh. xix. 28, 29). The word "breaches" refers to *incisions* made on the coast, or indentations. (Comp. Gen. xlix. 13).

18. Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeoparded, etc.] In contrast with those just mentioned, she makes most honourable mention of Zebulun and Naphtali. They not only came forward, but they exposed their lives in the unsheltered or open places of the field. They acted with contempt of life, when the honour of their God was at stake. They were found in the forefront of the fight, and, however great the risk, they thought only of doing their duty when the call was given. Similar contempt of life, when sacred principles were at stake, was exemplified by the apostles before the Sanhedrim, and especially by Paul and his coadjutors. (Acts xv. 26; xv. 24; xxi. 13, 14; Phil. iii. 8; Rev. ii. 10.)

19. Here begins a new strophe, giving a description of the battle. Kings came, and fought, etc.] As in the days of Joshua, the King of Hazor seems to have been at the head of a confederacy of kings (Josh. xi. 10.) As then, so now, these kings fought along with Jabin, showing the formidable nature of the array that was set against Israel, all under the command of Sisera "*Taanach*"—"the name is still preserved in a village on the slope of the hills skirting the plain on the south." (*Stanley*). "*Megiddo*" describes yet more accurately the spot in the plain where the battle was fought. Both are mentioned as royal cities in Josh. xii. 21. Both belonged to Manasseh, though just within the territories of Issachar (Josh. xvii. 11; 1 Chron. vii, 29). In these passages they are mentioned together—also in 1 Kings, iv. 12. "They were not quite five miles apart, and between them were several brooks which ran into the southern arm of the Kishon, that flowed through the plain, to the north of both these towns" (*Keil*). They took no gain of money.] They seized no spoil of silver—or, not so much as a single piece of silver. *Cassel* makes it, they received no composition money to buy them off without fighting, on the one hand, nor did they secure any booty after it, on the other. (Comp. 1 Kings xiv. 26; xv. 18; 2 Kings xv. 20).

20. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses, etc.] Another rapid transition, from

the kings fighting, to those that fought against them. It was not the Israelites alone that fought. If Sisera had confederates, so also had Israel. And these were from heaven—the stars in their courses. There were visible signs that the mighty hand of the Ruler of nature was at work—probably by a violent storm supernaturally raised, and beating full in the face of the foe, yet not such as to prevent Barak's army from carrying on the fight, or rather the pursuit—for it was not so much a *battle* as a *rout*. Whether hailstones beat in the faces of the Canaanites, driven by a fierce wind (Josh. x. 10, 11; 1 Sam. vii. 10); or whether simply a black thunder cloud came down upon them, accompanied by heavy drops of rain dashing in their faces, and also rendering the ground slippery and swampy (ver. 22), or, whether there were also threatening and lurid appearances in the sky, filling them with deadly terror, at the thought that the invisible powers were against them—that same mighty God of Israel that destroyed their fathers in the days of Joshua—we are not informed. But that the hand of the Almighty was displayed in some remarkable way, there can be no doubt; for of this we are expressly assured in chap. iv. 15. (Comp. Ex. xiv. 24). *The stars* have all along been supposed to rule the sky, and to exercise either a benign, or a disastrous influence, on the lot of men on the earth; so much so that it has become proverbial to speak of the stars as "propitious" or "unpropitious" (p. 234). (Comp. Ps. lxviii. 1, 3-5; xviii. 32-40; xliv. 1-7; also Ps. xviii. 7-17.)

21. The river of Kishon swept them away, etc.] When swollen by the sudden and tremendous downpouring from the skies. Sisera's army seems to have been collected to the south of the Kishon, between Taanach and Megiddo, according to the statement in chap. iv. 7. There they were collected as in a trap, for there was the greatest confluence of the waters. Also, when the terrible phenomena of the heavens came around them, they had no resource but to retrace their steps across the river, that being the only passage northward to their own country. But lo! suddenly, as if by magic, they find themselves deluged with water! The Kishon, which only two hours ago was a small brook that a foot traveller might easily cross, is now a roaring torrent, which sweeps away man, horse, and chariot before it. It overflows its banks, and the vast "multitude" of the great captain are overwhelmed amid the surging waves of an avenging sea. They little knew what resources were at the command of the God of Israel, and least of all did they foresee, that that diminutive stream was in a few hours to be the destruction of that mighty host. That ancient river, etc.] (p. 188), *that river so famous of old*. Most streams are amongst the oldest things in the world, realising the truth of the poet's lines on "The Brook"—

> "For men may come, and men may go,
> But I flow on for ever."

But the phrase in the text seems to refer, not so much to the existence of the river for so long a time, but to the fact that it was well known in past times for its remarkable associations. So recently as 1799, in a battle between the French and the Turks, many of the latter perished in the sudden rising of its waters. In the spring season, especially, it sends down a flood of rushing waters, and hence some think that the destruction of Sisera's host took place about the time of the Feast of Weeks—end of April or beginning of May. But this is pure conjecture, and proceeds on the supposition, that there was nothing more than natural influences at work on this great occasion when Jehovah threw Sisera's army into confusion, and, like a terrible champion fighting on behalf of Israel, smote it without quarter. Some think also that the attack made by Israel was made in the night season. This also is mere supposition—O, my soul, thou hast trodden down strength!] An exclamation of exultant gratitude for the immense victory gained. Fancying herself the spirit of the storm, riding on the top of the wave of victory, and seeing the vast image of might presented by Sisera's army ground before her to powder, which she sweeps like dust from her feet, she exclaims in adoring rapture—"O, my soul, thou hast trodden down strength!" This was said in the spirit of Mary, when she uttered the memorable words—"He that is mighty hath done for me great things; holy is His name!"

22. Then were the horses' hoofs broken by the means of the prancings, etc.] It was not customary to shod horses in the east on any occasion, hence their hoofs were apt to get broken through their plungings in the mire, or their wild stampings as they galloped in terror to get away in haste from the scene. The word here translated "prancings," refers to the blow given by a horse's foot, like that of a hammer on an anvil (Is. xli. 7). The Canaanites fled with the utmost precipitation, so that the horse's hoofs might in many cases have been splintered, battered, and broken by the roughness of the roads. "*Their mighty ones*" refers to the horses, as in Jer. viii. 16; xlvii. 3.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 12-22.

The List of Honour, and the List of Dishonour.

I. Services to God should be performed with alacrity and with zeal.

In all service rendered to God everything depends on the *spirit* in which it is performed. However excellent the professed object of any service may be, such as prayer or praise, it is nothing with God if it is a dead service. The Pharisee is never reckoned to have prayed to God at all, though, from the beginning to the end of life, he may have faultlessly gone through the forms of worship. In like manner, feeble or languid service is an unworthy offering to present before Him, who requires "to be worshipped in spirit and in truth." The requirement of the law of duty is "love with all the heart and soul." Of the same character ought every oblation to be which is laid on the altar of our God Dull or sluggish devotion resembles the presenting of "the torn," "the lame," or "the sick," in sacrifice to God. On the other hand, when the whole soul is awakened to the performance of any religious service, when every faculty is stirred up to do its part, when the understanding has clearness of perception, and fulness of appreciation, of both the matter and the obligation of the duty before it, when the will gives itself with full force and without any drawback to its discharge, when the conscience is implicity obeyed, when the affections are in the highest state of delight and fullest sympathy with the exercise, and when the whole soul presents itself with the utmost harmony in all its faculties in rendering the services, then it is a sacrifice coming up with a savour of sweet incense, acceptable and well-pleasing unto God.

Such was the character of the service which Deborah now laid upon the altar, in offering praise to the God of salvation for all that He had done. She is anxious that her tribute of thanksgiving should be rendered in the right frame of mind, and therefore begins with calling on her soul to rouse itself in every faculty, not only to have wandering thoughts called in, but to become quickened all through to go about the work before her in the most efficient manner. On such a theme she feels that her soul should be in a state of rapture; she feels that

"Passion is reason; transport temper here."

To this end ought we to begin all service rendered to God, with earnest supplications for the all-quickening Spirit to fill our hearts, that we may not be cold or lethargic in the performance of duty, but do everything with appreciation of the excellence of the service, and in warm and cordial sympathy with it (Ps. lxxi. 22–24; cviii. 2; cxix. 16, 25, 47, 48, etc.). The spirits before the throne are examples of the services that are most glorifying to God, and that most abundantly receive His approving smile. "His will is done in heaven," not only nominally and universally, but with fervent and exultant hearts, cheerfully and with alacrity, promptly, swiftly and unquestioningly. The seraphim, "with two of their wings do fly," rather, stand in the attitude of being ready to fly at a moment's notice, when the lightest whisper is given by Him who sits on the throne. "The living creatures in the wheels ran and returned like a flash of lightning."

II. Redemption seasons are testing seasons.

Deborah's day was marked by a great redemption wrought for Israel, and it was pre-eminently a time for putting the whole people to a strict test of character before God. This paragraph is occupied with a stating of the result brought out by the application of the test. Never since the days of Joshua had such a sifting process been gone through as now. The touch-stone was, "Who would run every hazard for the honour of God's name?" Some were expressly called on to devote themselves to the work, as in the case of Zebulun and Naphtali. Others had merely the opportunity presented, but were not directly called. This, however, sufficed to test whether the heart was sufficiently sensitive to come forward to uphold that honour, or whether it was so indifferent as to prefer to risk nothing, by declining to move, when left entirely to itself to decide.

So it was with most of the other tribes. This testing of character was made in intimate association with the deliverance wrought, implying that it was most important, and indeed essential, that the two things should go together. For:

1. **God's church must be purified when she receives special marks of His favour.** It is ever to a pure church that He grants His blessings—penitent, trustful, loyal. When, at any time, much idolatrous impurity has gathered around it, with the "fan in His hand, He thoroughly purges his floor," separating the wheat from the chaff. Any circumstances which bring out whether regard for religious principle prevails over love of ease, or worldly interest, will serve for a winnowing process. When Christ came, there was a thorough sifting of men's characters, by the strict rules which He laid down for admission into His kingdom. He judged everything in character by "the thoughts and intents of the heart." Fair appearances without that were nothing. This test was so sharp in its operation, that it cut off whole classes of persons who reckoned themselves most sure of entering the kingdom—fulfilling the prophetic words, "*Who may abide the day of His coming? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap?*" (Isa. xxxi. 9; Dan. v. 27; 1 Cor. xi. 19, 32; Luke ii. 35). The ocean requires storms to sweep over it to keep it from putrefying.

Different in appearance, yet similar in reality, were the means taken, in Deborah's days, to ascertain whether the professing church possessed the true features of the Divine image—love to God showing itself in reverence for the Divine name, zeal for the Divine honour, devotion to the cause of God, obedience under trying circumstances to His call, and willingness to make great personal sacrifices for His sake. When God would do great things on behalf of His church, He first sees to it, that, in character and conduct, it is somewhat worthy of Him. He first "*heals Israel's backslidings*," and then "*loves him freely. He becomes to him as the dew, causing Him to grow as the lily, and to cast forth his roots as Lebanon.*" The summons to do battle with Sisera was a searching test of character for the tribes of Israel, and was amply sufficient to prove, that every man who stood it was a man of faith and an Israelite indeed. As representing Israel, the noble band who presented themselves on the hill of Tabor was the sample of a pure church.

Parallel cases. (1.) In the wide-spread *idolatry of the Ahab and Jezebel period*, the people as a whole were tested on the question, whetner they would accept of Jehovah or Baal to be their God; and an unanimous response was made for Jehovah. Then the long-denied blessing of rain was sent on the land.

(2.) *Before the people entered on the possession of the promised inheritance*, a winnowing process of solemn dealings had been carried on with them in the wilderness, resulting in the disappearance, by plagues and otherwise, of the unbelieving fathers, and the burning of many salutary lessons into the hearts of the children, so that when the time for granting the blessing came, they went forward with steady trust in their God against the formidable hosts of the Canaanites.

(3.) Previous to *the great deliverance, which God wrought for Israel at Ebenezer* in the days of Samuel, we are told that "all Israel lamented after the Lord, put away their strange gods, and served Jehovah only."

(4.) *When God promised in the days of Ezekiel*, that, ere long, He would deliver His captive Israel, and bring them into their own land, He also promised to "sprinkle them with cleansing water, and purge them from all their filthiness and idols."

(5.) *Before the first Christian Church was favoured with the remarkable Pentecostal effusion* from on high, proof was given that, though small in numbers, she was, as regards character before God, in an eminently fit state to

receive the promised blessing from her exalted Lord. All were Israelites indeed; all were devotedly attached to their Lord; all were full of the spirit of prayer, and were strong in faith; and all had much of the spirit of love and unity.

2. **Some must be found to stand the test when deliverance is granted.** It is only on account of such that deliverance comes. It is seldom that all can abide the test applied. In the present case, several whole tribes were unrepresented in the day of decision, while some others sent only a small contingent. But there were a considerable number (more than 10,000) whose loyalty was unmistakable; and it was because of the noble decision of these men, in coming forward to fight the battle of the Lord, that the Divine presence and protection were extended to the whole nation at this juncture. Had Israel become so corrupt, that none had been found faithful in adherence to the cause of Jehovah, there had been no deliverance; for, in such a case, there would have been no spot in the picture on which the Divine eye could have rested with complacency; and so, the vine which God brought out of Egypt must, like the barren fig-tree, have been cut down as a cumberer of the soil. There must ever be something to justify God in showing marks of His favour. Had even Sodom's walls contained but ten righteous persons, that number, small as it is, of men who bore the image of God, would have made it a suitable thing for God to have spared the whole city for a time. But the principle is, that the wicked are only spared for the sake of the righteous. Hence the propriety of asking the people to give themselves as *volunteers* to this battle, that it might be seen who were faithful to the covenant of the God of Israel. These being discovered, the blessing came on the whole land for their sakes (Ps. xxv. 10; Acts xxvii. 24; Job xlii. 8; Gen. xx. 17; xix. 29; Ex. xxxii. 9, 10, 14).

Parallel cases. (1.) In the days of *the purgation of Jerusalem*, two-thirds of the people were to be destroyed, but the remaining third were to be purified in the fire, and preserved as a people to keep up the honour of Jehovah's name in the earth (Zech. xiii. 9). (2.) At the time of the iniquitous *worship of the golden calf*, a stern test was applied. In reply to the question, "Who is on the Lord's side?" all the sons of Levi stood forward, and complied with the rigorous requirement, to slay every man his brother and companion. Because of this staunch loyalty to the sovereignty of their God, and that too of such of the people, as stripped themselves of their ornaments and mourned for their sin, the whole people were spared at a moment when they were in imminent risk of being consumed. (Ex. xxxii. 26-29; xxxiii. 4-6, 14). (3.) *When the spies returned* from their mission, and gave depressing accounts of the difficulty of subduing the land, a strong test was applied to the faith of the people, so that we hear of none except Caleb and Joshua, along with Moses, who stood fast in their allegiance to their God. The result was, that the masses perished in the wilderness, but, for the sake of the few who stood the test, another generation more believing than the fathers were raised up, to preserve the name of Israel, as the people of the living God. (4.) Out of regard to the presence of *one good king, Jehoshaphat*, the armies of three kings, who were gathered together in the land of Moab, were saved in a remarkable manner, when otherwise they would certainly have perished of the miseries of thirst (2 Kings iii. 14).

3. **A testing process is needed to discover fit instruments for accomplishing the deliverance.** Israel's present needs discovered not only Deborah and Barak, but also the whole of the good men and true, who formed the army of the deliverance. The fire tries every man's character of what sort it is. Times of great peril bring men of decision to the front. Ordinary men can steer the vessel, so long as there is only a gentle ripple on the surface, but, when the waves run mountains high, it takes the firmest nerve, and the most skilful seamanship, to bring it safely to harbour. When an army of children are in the

field, there are no circumstances to test valour, or soldierly bearing. But let a legion of Anakim appear, and instantly, the men of true faith, and unshaken confidence in their God, are discovered. Thus *Joshua* came to be known as one fitted to lead the people, in the work of dispossessing the Canaanites of the rich lands, they had shown themselves to be so unworthy to occupy. It was thus that the *Othniels* and *Shamgars*, the *Baraks* and *Gideons*, and other "saviours" of their country and people were brought to light. It was thus too, that *David* had such remarkable qualities of character exhibited, as fitted him, not only to save Israel from all their perils, but also to raise them rapidly to the highest pitch of prosperity. Thus too *Joseph* became known as a man qualified to rescue multitudes in his day, from the horrors of general famine, at a time of greatest peril to all lands.

In general history, such names as these might be mentioned, as persons whose great qualities became known, through the perilous character of their times, viz., *Alfred*, *Wallace*, *Bruce*, *Tell*, *Cincinnatus*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Hannibal*, *Napoleon Buonaparte*, *Cromwell*, *Columbus*, *Washington*, and many others. In sacred, or church history, such names might be given as the *twelve apostles*, *Paul* and his companions, the *Christian Martyrs*, *Chrysostom*, *Augustine*, *Luther*, *Calvin*, *Wesley*, *Whitfield*, *Knox*, the *Scottish Covenanters*, the *English Puritans*, *Carey*, *Martin*, *Brainerd*, etc.

4. **Redemption times are times for imparting new life to the Church.** God accompanies her deliverance with His blessing. This is seen in various ways: (1.) *He makes the testing process become a healthful discipline.* To have a severe test applied, such as that which the people of Israel now experienced, was to suffer a great disturbance of one's natural ease. A peremptory call was made to sacrifice personal feelings, in order to maintain religious principle. A strong act of will was required to be put forth on the side of righteousness, at the expense of inflicting deep pain on natural feelings. There was indeed a call to "crucify the flesh." But this was really a blessing in disguise, for it was a great step taken towards self-conquest—the point of obeying implicitly the call of religious duty, without any murmuring from "flesh and blood." It implied a destruction of those elements in a man's nature, which would resist the Divine voice.

Any strong exercise of self-denial, indeed, is a most healthful discipline when God so overrules it. From the want of this, many persons get settled down in their old depressed habits, just as wine, when not emptied from vessel to vessel, gets settled on its lees, and, as the result, there is greater weddedness to evil, and greater insensibility to good. But sharp and imperious calls for making sacrifice of feeling on behalf of principle, shake the soul out of this state of spiritual torpor, and clear away the dangerous crusts which would otherwise soon encase it in a state of hardness (comp. Jer. xlviii. 11, 12; Ps. lv. 19; Amos vi. 1; Zeph. i. 12). Great storms teach a man to take the helm with a firm hand amid the tossings and dashings of the wave. They rouse up his spirit to guide the vessel steadily in its course, shunning the rocks, steering safely between Scylla and Charybdis, and at last reaching the desired haven on the other side. Discipline begets courage, presence of mind, hardihood in braving dangers, and great promptness in meeting them. It requires more than the mild zephyrs of summer to make a great character. The rough Borean blasts of winter are more likely to produce the thing desired. Discipline moulds character. A beautiful statue lies in the block of marble; discipline, like the hand of the sculptor, brings it out.

(2.) *He fills His Church with gratitude and praise.* This is the natural effect of obtaining a great and scarcely expected deliverance. Nothing is better fitted to awaken in the soul a sense of fresh and powerful obligations, than when such

a blessing is conferred. Of the influence of gratitude we have already spoken (see p. 259, 260).

(3.) *She experiences a new sense of liberty.* She is freed at once from a heavy external oppression, and from an inward load of anxiety on the heart. Hence a new flush of zeal, and a fresh glow of ardour in the service of God. Hence a "pressing forward to what is before," with a lighter and more buoyant heart.

(4.) *She also feels that a new and brighter hope is enkindled within her.* Hope is one of the mightiest of all motives in stimulating to activity. Sometimes it is represented as "an anchor of the soul, keeping it sure and steadfast." At other times, it is spoken of as a powerful spring of influence, causing the soul to bound forward to meet a joyous future, and already to realise that future. The dark clouds of Israel's coming history, so long lurid in their appearance, were now tipped all over with golden edgings. They were "saved by hope;" and so cheered and quickened in doing their great work as a Church.

(5.) *Fresh supplies of Divine influence are also given.* When He shows His love to the Church by granting a great deliverance, it is but seemly that it should also receive a fresh touch from His gracious hand, to make it more like to Himself and more worthy of His love. Hence, oftentimes a fresh baptism of the Spirit is imparted, and a quickening of the Church life takes place, at the same time that she is delivered out of the hands of her enemies. It is, indeed, expressly stated that He would redeem His people out of the hands of their enemies, that they "might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of their life." When the time for rebuilding the waste places of Zion should come round, God promises to "lay her stones with fair colours, and her foundations with sapphires, to make her windows of agate, her gates of carbuncles, and all her borders of pleasant stones." Frequently, on the pages of prophecy, God's visiting His Church with visible and temporal prosperity, is regarded as synonymous with granting her a spiritual revival (see Isa. lx. 1, etc.; lii. 1, 2; xli. 10–20; xxxii. 13–18; xliii. 1–6; xlix. 13–23; Zech. xii. 8–10; Jer. xxxii. 37–44).

III. **The character of the men on God's list of honour.** The *matter to be decided* in the contest between Sisera and Israel was not simply, whether Israel was to continue any longer as one of the separate nations of the earth—though that too was greatly important, the preservation or extinction of a nation—but it was the far larger question, whether the honour of Israel's God was to be kept up, by showing Himself able to protect the people that were called by His name, and whom he had engaged to defend, and also, whether he should henceforth continue to have a people to represent Him on the earth at all. This lifted the contention to an infinitely higher pitch than an ordinary fight between two armies. The *test* applied to Israel, we have also seen was such, as to make a thorough sifting of religious character, sure to detect the half-hearted and the faint hearted, and which only the thorough-going Israelites could stand. For this double reason—that the occasion was one of such vast importance, and that the terms required of those who should devote themselves were so crucial, it was meet, that those who ranged themselves on the Lord's side should have their names put down on a list of honour, for remembrance through all the ages of time, in the hallowed circle of the church of the living God.

What names were put on this list?

(1.) *Not all who were "of Israel."* For "they are not all (counted to be) Israel, who are of Israel." The vast majority of those who were by birth the seed of Abraham, in this age, as in so many other ages, belonged to another category. Only those who could take their life in their hand, and do their duty to their God

at any cost, were counted worthy. Decision of religious character, and not the accident of natural birth, constitutes the differentiating line. Allegiance to God must be held superior to all other considerations.

(2.) *Not merely the brave.* All who fought on the side of Israel this day were true heroes, and were on that account deserving of an honourable place in the history of the nation. We admire a spirit of true courage and high-souled bearing, wherever it is shown; and never does such a spirit shine to more advantage, than when it is exhibited in defence of God's truth, and God's cause on the earth. Yet simple bravery is not in itself a religious virtue, and may be possessed by those who have neither part nor lot with the people of God. It is most beautiful when associated with true religion, when under its control, and enlisted in its service; but it is to fall down to a heathen Roman standard of virtue, to make it synonymous with religion itself.

(3.) *Not merely the patriotic.* Not a few make so much of the qualities of patriotism and bravery, as shown in these days of the Judges, that they speak of these features, as that on which the claim of these men to live in history rests. It is spoken of as the heroic—the iron age—the military age; the age of great warriors, and great feats, accomplished on the battle-field. But to regard that as the chief thing, fails to bring out the true interest of the history. To confine the narrative to this, is to reduce it to the level of common history, and to put its sacred character into the shade. Love of one's country, according to a mere human standard, is a feature held in great estimation. We account the true patriot one of the most honourable of men. And patriotism, in the case of the Jew, had a specially hallowed character. He dwelt in a "holy land," a land which was the gift of Jehovah Himself to His chosen people, as a pledge of His love, a land which was sacred to the cause of righteousness in a world of sin, which was ruled over by Jehovah as its king, and which was the spot chosen by Jehovah, for the development of the great scheme of human redemption by Jesus Christ. Yet something, even of this, the Israelite might have, in the way of national pride, without having any true love in his heart to God. Patriotism, after all, is but the second thing. That which entitled any to have their names placed on God's special list of honour was:

1. Their deep concern for the honour of the Divine name. This, more than any other circumstance, characterised the men who now stood forward in the defence of the cause of their God. They were true fearers of the God of Israel, and nothing was dearer to their hearts, than to see His name worshipped and honoured throughout the land. Though not possessed of the bright display of the Divine character which we now have in the face of Jesus Christ, they did not fail to prize the manifestation of that character, which they had in their own national institutions and history. The former of these set forth a wonderful subject of study, in a system where "Mercy and Truth did meet together, and Righteousness and Peace embraced each other." And in the latter—their national history—they saw a great meaning in the mighty signs and wonders, which had been wrought for them, since the days of the land of Egypt. In both these together, as in a Bible, they found a treasury of materials, from which to form fit conceptions of what reverence, love, and praise were due to the name of the God of Israel. And, in proportion as that name was most dear to them, and hallowed by them, were they concerned and distressed to see it every day, for so long a time, blasphemed over the land. They were not insensible to all the streams of mercy, which their God had made to follow them in every part of their history, to His Fatherly watchful care over them, and the costly love He had lavished on them, in so many forms, as the people He had chosen for Himself; and now, it was most painful for them to look on the dark ingratitude of their people, their infidelity to their sacred

engagements to follow Jehovah only, and to hear the shouts of triumph on the part of the heathen, in celebrating the praises of their dumb idol gods, as far superior to the God of the trampled down Hebrews! To show the burning anxiety of their hearts, the moment they got an opportunity of doing something to retrieve the dishonour done to Jehovah's name, they embraced it without delay, counting not their lives dear to them, if only they might well perform the deep obligations, under which they felt themselves, to speak and act for the glory of Israel's God.

Examples. In this they resembled the good in the days of Malachi, who, amid abounding iniquity "*feared the Lord and thought upon His name—speaking often one to another*," as to what might be best to be done. This was most pleasing to their God, *who* "*hearkened and heard and a book of remembrance was written before Him*" on their behalf. Similarly, too, did the good in Ezekiel's days act, "*who did sigh and cry for all the abominations that were done in the midst of Jerusalem.*" Their names were taken down to be remembered for future honours (Mal. iii. 16, 17; Ezek. ix. 4, etc., also Ps. cxix. 136, 53, 158). God's rule is, "*them that honour me I will honour*" (see Luke xxii. 28-30; Mal. iv. 2; Ps. lxxxv. 9, cxii. 1-3; Zech. i. 14, viii. 1-8; Ps. cxlvii. 11; Lev. x. 1-3). Abraham acted for the honour of his God, when he said, "*Let there be no strife between thee and me*"—for the Canaanite is in the land, and nothing will be so much to the discredit of our religion in his eyes, as to see those who profess the name of God falling out among themselves (Gen. xiii. 7-9). Thus did David show jealousy for the name of his God, when he uttered the noble words, "*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God's*" (1 Sam. xvii. 26; see also 2 Kings xxii. 19, 20; Gen. xxii. 12, 16-18).

2. Their self-dedication to uphold the Divine honour. "*The people willingly offered themselves.*" Emphasis is put on this as the principal thing worthy of celebration. It is indeed the text of the ode—the thing to be sung of, along with the signal defeat of the enemy; for verse 2 contains a statement of the subject of the whole chapter. This thought is again alluded to in verse 9, and enlarged in verses 13–18 and 23, where the distinction is drawn, and the greatest importance attached to it, between those who spontaneously offered themselves to the great work, and those who drew back—the one being mentioned with special marks of honour, and the other being consigned to reproach, and even to cursing.

(1.) *Every man who came forward at Barak's call was a volunteer.* It was the act of his own free-will. Barak was indeed directed to raise 10,000 men out of Zebulun and Naphtali; but in what manner? It is not given in the form of a peremptory *command*, either to the tribes as such, or to individuals, saying, "Go, and fight against this company," but "Who will go?" Hence the careful wording of the charge given to Barak, "Go and *draw* towards Mount Tabor" (iv. 6)—implying that no one was to be compelled, but the act was to come of their own accord. And when Barak went to fulfil his commission, he *called* them—he did not *command* them under penalties. Their acceptance of all risks was their own spontaneous act. Barak seems to have found no difficulty in finding the number of men wanted; and besides these, there seem to have been a considerable number of volunteers from the other tribes. With men of true principle, though not expressly called, it was yet motive enough to have the opportunity offered. They required no farther inducement. But the feature in the account to which God calls special attention is, that those who came forward to meet this all-important juncture for God's cause, did *so by an act of self-surrender.* It was in the highest sense a *religious act.*

(2.) *A single act sometimes sheds a flood of light on the whole character.* It reveals the motives and hidden springs of action, and shows, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the true pole to which the heart points. It indicates, not only whether the bias is towards God, but how strong that bias is, how much it is willing to sacrifice for Him, and whether its affection is supreme. In the present instance, the test of character was so strong, that every man who took the field, felt he was endangering his life; and virtually said, he was prepared to make the sacrifice for the honour of His God. Translated into words his act meant, "it is not necessary for me to live; it is indispensable that I should be loyal to my God!" One of the "six hundred" of the famous Balaklava charge, on being asked by the writer of these lines, what he thought when the order was given to take the Russian guns in front, replied, "I thought of nothing but obeying orders!" Such was the spirit of these noble-hearted Israelites. They thought of nothing but vindicating the name of their God, when an opportunity offered.

(3.) *This spirit of free self-consecration makes the service done specially well-pleasing to God.* When devotion to God rises higher than the love of life itself, it is pre-eminently a sacrifice which comes up with an odour of a sweet smell unto God. Never did any single act we read of in all history, receive such a marked commendation from God, as the act of *Abraham*, in laying his only son, whom he loved, on the altar, as a sacrifice, in obedience to God's command. In that surrender, he sacrificed his tenderest human affections, and his brightest future hopes, all from loyalty to his God, and so was rewarded with blessings of the highest mark down to the end of time. When *Esther* went in to the king, she took her life in her hand, rather than see the destruction of the people of her God, and so a book is written to immortalise her memory. It was a deep heart-sorrow to *Nehemiah*, when he heard how the city of his God lay in ruins, and was a reproach among the heathen, and, at the risk of his life, he sought permission of his king to rebuild its walls; for which act his name shines like a star, from age to age, in the firmament of the Church. Other examples we have in the recorded history of *Moses* and of *David* on many occasions; of *Joshua* and *Caleb* (Num. xiv. 6-10); of *Zerubbabel*, and the *chief of the fathers* in his day (Ezra iii. and iv); *the Apostles* (Acts v. 41); *Stephen* (Acts vi. vii.); also *John the Baptist* (Mark vi. 17-20); and *Paul* on many occasions. These men were noble illustrations of the principle of loyalty, which the Saviour Himself lays down as the rule in His kingdom, in Luke xiv. 26.

3. Their faith, which overcame all obstacles. Their distinctive character was, that they were men of faith. This in God's sight is incomparably more honourable, than to say, they were "governors," "princes," or "men that rode on white asses." Some of them were such, yet not because they were so, but because they acted as men of faith, and true loyalty to their God, are they there enrolled on God's list of honour. Birth, valour, skill, knowledge, and patriotism, in their place, gain distinction among men. But it is by faith, carried out into practice amid the stern difficulties of life, that the names which live through all time in God's Book of remembrance, have their title to be marked out as those whom God delights to honour. Had they gone to this battle merely from love of adventure, or from a certain love of romance, which some people find in the practice of war, their names had long since perished, like myriads of others of whom we only vaguely know that once they were.

(1.) *They believed in the face of natural impossibility.* Had Barak's handful of men calculated the probable chances of war, according to natural appearances, they must have unanimously come to the conclusion, that without supernatural aid, there was not the faintest possibility [illegible] eeding against the masses of

the Canaanitish host. Nothing could be more foolhardy, than to engage the enemy with such a disparity of force. So few in number—the want of discipline—the want of arms—the want of skill and prestige; while the enemy were a numerous host, disciplined in a high degree—well equipped with armour and having chariots of iron—also stalwart and strong in physique—there seemed no proportion between the two camps. There was the clearest proof, that they were men of the right stamp; that they could trust their God when all was dark around them, as well as when the way was clear; that God, having promised to go out before them, would find ways and means of vindicating His own cause, though they did not see how. They believed that though there was not a speck of cloud in the sky, though there was no muttering of thunder, or sign of earthquake, or pestilence, or other large army brought to their assistance; though they knew absolutely nothing of the means by which God was to fight against Sisera, and saw no possible natural means that could be used, they yet believed that God would, in some way known to Himself, appear on their behalf at the right time, and would effectually dispose of the enemy's force, simply on the ground, that He had given his word for it that it should be so. Through Deborah He had spoken. The whole scheme of battle was of His appointment, which amounted to a series of testimonies that He would fight for them. An express assurance was also given by Deborah (chap. iv. 14). This belief in God's bare word, in the face of apparent impossibilities, is true faith—the faith which overcomes.

Abraham believed God's simple testimony respecting a numerous seed, and waited on for more than twenty years, though all hope of its fulfilment, in the ordinary course of nature, had passed away. Moses believed that God would supply food and drink to His people in the wilderness and trusted accordingly, though he knew nothing, when he entered it, about the descent of manna daily for forty years, or the water gushing out of the rock for so long a time. He only knew that God had commanded him to conduct the people through the wilderness, and that for all details He must trust Him to provide everything when the time came. Every sinner, under the gospel, is required to believe on God's testimony, that all his sins will be graciously forgiven, if he trusts in "Christ crucified," as the appointed way of receiving a righteous pardon, and if he also expresses deep sorrow for his sins, and is sincere in desiring to lead a new life. It is faith, too, which says, "I know that God will hear my prayer for Christ's sake, when I trust in Christ and have sorrow for my sins, because I have God's word for it."

(2). *They trusted in God to bring out any issue that He pleased.* This also is part of the province of faith, and it is a higher province than that just mentioned. They believed it was their duty, not to dictate, or suggest anything as to the best issue, nor even to ask questions, but to leave it all in God's hand, assured that He had a perfect knowledge of all the circumstances, could at any moment determine what was best to be done, both for His glory and for their good, and that He would infallibly do it. Prayer would indeed be abundantly offered in expression of their desires, but always in submission to His will. Their trust in Him was complete, that He would always do what was best; the ground of this trust being God's own character, because He is what He is. Illustrations of this are everywhere in Scripture (John xvii. 11; xiv. 31; Luke xxii. 42; 1 Sam. iii. 18; Ps. xxxvii. 5; Isa. xxvi. 3; 2 Sam. xvi. 10–12; Job i. 21; Lam. iii. 26.

(3.) *They believed in God's glory as the highest and most sacred of all things.* Apart from all consequences, they could not rest, while God's glory was tarnished, and His honour was laid in the dust. That one fact was sufficient to rouse every dormant energy they possessed, and lead them to acquiesce in any requirement that might be made, for retrieving the honour of the Divine name.

They had indeed the expectation of deliverance by some miraculous means, but independent of that, simply on the ground that God's name had been profaned, and that reverence for it must be restored, they offered themselves up heart and soul at the call of duty. Whether they should die or live, it was enough for them to know, that the way was opened for their striking a blow in so sacred a cause.

(4.) *They believed that God would be faithful to all His promises and gracious purposes, i.e.,* to all that was contained in His covenant with His people. For His covenant contains not only promises, but also purposes and arrangements—the promises and arrangements being the unfolding of the purposes. The purport of the whole transaction, on this occasion, they understood to be the manifestation of Jehovah's glory before all eyes, in the redemption of His people from the hands of their enemies. This redemption they believed must be accomplished, because it was in the line of the fulfilment of the Divine promises, and the unfolding of the gracious purposes, towards the chosen people. These are mentioned throughout Scripture as the grounds of many a deliverance (Ps. cv. 42-45; cvi. 41-46; xxv. 10; lxxxv. 8-10; lxxxix. 3-5, 22-24, 33-36; Josh. xxi. 45; Isa. liv. 7-10).

Firm in this faith, these true-hearted Israelites saw no difficulties in the way. In their eyes, the mountains had already become a plain. It was for them simply to await the call of their God, and act entirely as He might direct. Their faith could "remove mountains" and "overcome the world." All these belonged to the list of honour.

IV. The names on the list of dishonour. In the trial of character now made, while some nobly stood the test, many more were found wanting. The rock on which they split was, their unwillingness to sacrifice their own personal ease and comfort for the sake of their religious principles. Thus it was with the multitudes who came around the Saviour, desirous to become His disciples, but who stumbled at the announcement, "if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Human nature is substantially the same in all ages. The claims of flesh and blood are preferred to God's honour and the interests of His cause. Men think of their own feelings and interests first, whatever may befall God's name or cause in the world. In opposition to this the Master lifts his voice in the solemn and oft-repeated formula, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and he who loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Illustrations of the latter part of this statement have been given above; now we have illustrations of the former part. There are four classes specified here who cannot stand the test: 1. Those who are *emotional but without principle;* 2. *The non-emotional and indifferent;* 3. Those who are *engrossed with the cares of this life;* 4. Those who *stubbornly refuse to declare themselves on the Lord's side.* The first three cases correspond with the three classes of unprofitable hearers, whom the Saviour describes in the parable of the sower. The circumstances are different, but the outlines of character are the same. We have:

1. **Those that are emotional, but without principle.** Of this Reuben is the illustration, who, at once, with a flush of impulsive feeling joyfully responded to the call made to arise and defend the Lord's cause, but quickly, as they began to realise the stern demand of self-denial made upon them, the hopeful feeling began to evaporate, and all trace of their heroic professions speedily disappeared. So it was with the stony-ground hearers. When gospel truths were brought before their minds, instantly they were aglow with love, with admiration, with zeal, or warm devotion, according to the representation made, and they are forward to make great professions of devotedness to the cause of their God. But there is no counting of the cost; there is no fixed principle as the source of these

feelings. And when they come face to face with the real sacrifices they will have to make by entering Christ's service, they begin to cool down, and try to make a compromise.

This marks the character of Reuben. (See Critical Notes, verses 15, 16.) At first, "*by the brooks of Reuben, there were great resolutions of heart.*" High purposes were formed, and proud protestations were made. The lions were seen only in the imagination, and in their ardour they would fight and overcome a whole army of them. But when the first gush of zeal was over, and they began to think what it would really cost to beard the lions, their impetuous valour slackened rein and became more discreet. When fear was aroused, first they came to a *standstill;* then began to *doubt;* then to be *irresolute;* next to be *lukewarm;* and finally to *waver;* to attempt a *compromise;* and end in *drawing back.* Hence, in verse 16, we read, "*By the brooks of Reuben there were anxious ponderings of heart*"—searchings, debatings with themselves, as to what decision they should come to, to get out of the dilemma. They loved their ease too well, reclining on the green pastures, and beside the purling brooks of their rich pastoral country, to think of going out to try conclusions at arms with the war-like Sisera. Hence, on second thoughts, they would exercise their ingenuity in endeavouring to discover reasons, to justify them in falling from their first magnanimous purpose, to go manfully forward among the foremost in this holy enterprise.

What were the resolutions? "Let us go boldly forward! Let us take the lead! It must not be said of the men of Reuben, that they were either ashamed or afraid, to do battle for the Lord against the mighty. Rather, it becomes the tribe of the eldest brother to lead the van, and be an example of loyalty to all the other tribes. Let us, as of old, go ready armed (Num. xxxii. 17) along with our brethren, to deliver the land from the dark shadow of the oppressor. Let but the arm of the Lord awake, as in the ancient days—the days of the renowned Joshua, when Sun and Moon stood still in their places, when hailstones fell from heaven on the heads of the enemies, and when armies of hornets made them turn their backs. Then fear shall take hold on the Canaanitish host, their hearts shall melt like wax, and there shall not be spirit in them any more." But when the fit of fervour was over, and they began to look calmly at difficulties, fears came trooping up like dark clouds gradually darkening a bright blue sky.

What were the earnest deliberations? "After all, *we* have not been called to engage in this conflict, like the men of Zebulun and Naphtali. If any others are expected to assist in the great cause, it devolves on the tribes to the west of the Jordan to come to the rescue. Nine tribes and a half are Cis-Jordanic; are not these sufficient to meet the emergency? The remaining two and a half tribes being Trans-Jordanic, may well be exempted. Besides we are a pastoral people, unaccustomed to the work of war, and could do little against iron chariots—surely, *we* should be excused. Many lives would certainly be lost, and our dwellings be turned into houses of mourning. During our absence too, who would defend our hearths, and care for our cattle; and when there are such immense flocks and herds in our borders, it would be most culpable in us to leave them without shepherds to tend and provide for them. Charity and justice alike begin at home. Our first duty is to our wives and children, our domestics, and our cattle. And then, it cannot be wondered at, if a pastoral people, accustomed to dwell in fertile meadows, should prefer to hear the pipings of the shepherds, sitting in peaceful security, to the wild blasts of the war-trumpets, summoning the hosts to the battlefields. On the whole, we think it better to remain at home."

It is the old manner of the deceitful human heart, "I go, sir; and went not." "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, and went back to her people and her gods."

The stony-ground hearer's good resolutions soon "withered away." The aged apostle confessed that with the lapse of time, which tries all things, "all they that were in Asia had turned away from him," even such leaders as "Phygellus and Hermogenes." The Galatian Christians who at first "received him as an angel of God, and would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him," by-and-bye began to forsake him for the Judaising teachers of the day. Such conduct is not only contemptible because of its cowardice and selfishness, but is also heinously guilty, because it trifles with the honour of Jehovah's name, and turns the back on all the sacred claims of duty we owe to Him. Against all such frittering away of sacred obligations of duty, "the day of the Lord that cometh shall burn as an oven." The next class is:

2. **The non-emotional and indifferent.** This class is represented by Gilead, meaning Gad, and the portion of Manasseh, that was beyond Jordan. They showed little or no feeling in the matter, but remained passive. They correspond somewhat to the wayside hearers. These the Saviour likens to the hard common, or public highway, that is beaten down through the rush of traffic upon it—"the constant trail of the waggons of business." It denotes minds that are, through ignorance, or want of receptivity, insensible to gospel calls, and deaf to gospel arguments and pleadings; that in fact feel nothing, and decide nothing because they understand nothing. The truth produces the same effect on them that water does on a stone. There is no movement of the conscience and the heart.

"*Gilead abides beyond Jordan.*" They were simply indifferent, but in their case, godlessness, not ignorance, seems to have been the cause. Even indifference at such a crisis was a most serious crime. They had no heart to the cause of their God. This lay at the bottom of their indifference, for without this there was no propelling power to move them forward. And having nothing to urge them on, on the one side, there was much to keep them back on the other. They seemed to say—"*We* are not bound to enter into this conflict. It is no concern of ours. We live on the Trans-Jordanic side of the country, and are away from the scene of conflict. It belongs to the tribes whose territories are exposed to the incursions of the great northern power. Barak has not called us to take part in this struggle, and as the river divides us from the battlefield, it cannot be held obligatory in us to move in the matter. It is purely a matter of option with us, and being so, we prefer to run no risk. Why should we rush needlessly into danger? We are a pastoral people and care little for the work of war. But we trust our brethren will be victorious, and we shall be glad to see them freed from the grasp of the cruel oppressor."

And so these people of the east of Jordan lands became conspicuous by their absence. But by their passive attitude and stolid indifference they contracted the highest degree of guilt. It is as if a man could look on and see a friend, whom he was under the weightiest obligations to love and esteem, openly insulted and foully calumniated, while yet he did not speak a word, or show the slightest concern for his friend's honour and good name. When a man acts thus by his God, it becomes incomparably more criminal, for it implies that he is perfectly indifferent to the honour of Jehovah's great name! Nothing could more provoke God to anger, or excite more thorough contempt on the part of man. It is an outrage on the name of religious brotherhood, and it is a daring defiance of the jealousy of Him who is a consuming fire! (Rev. iii. 14, 15.)

3. **Those who are engrossed with the cares of this life.** This we take to be the spirit of the allusion made to Dan and Asher. "*Why does Dan tarry in ships? Asher sits still by the sea-shore, and reposes in his creeks and river mouths.*" They are loth to leave their comfortable home on the Mediterranean. It is highly probable, that a large number of the Phœnicians, and the great com-

mercial traders in the north-west of Palestine, were in Sisera's army; in which case, had the tribes of Dan and Asher embarked on this conflict, they must have quarrelled with their nearest neighbours and best customers. For it would appear that the principal trade of these two tribes was by sea. By going to war, therefore, with the populations of the sea-board, "their craft would be in danger." In reply to solicitations to join their brethren, they would doubtless reply as many have done since, and still do from age to age, "Our worldly interests will materially suffer should we dare to draw the sword against Sisera. An embargo will be put on our ships. Our maritime trade will be annihilated. Terrible reprisals also will be sure to come from the enemy. Besides we have ships in harbour getting ready for sea; and we have a fleet of small vessels engaged in trade, which must all become useless, and be laid up on the beach as so much rotten wood, if we venture to enter into battle with those with whom we carry on transactions in business. It would be madness in us to follow Barak in this conflict. We pray you, let us be excused! We are extremely sorry it should be so; but if you take from us our staple trade we shall be absolutely ruined. We wish all success to Zebulun and Naphtali in this unequal contest; but since they only have been expressly called to come forward, let the matter rest as so arranged. We pray you again, hold us excused!" Those who speak thus virtually say, "when our worldly interests are touched, ye have taken away our gods, and what have we more?" The favour of God, instead of being the all-important motive, is put into the background, and scarcely counts for anything, while men's portion of good in this life practically becomes the only consideration. The honour of God's name touches them but very lightly, if at all, but how to preserve their own worldly interest engrosses their whole soul. They think it preposterous, when their temporal business is in danger, that they should be expected to do anything for God's cause and interest in the world. They seem never to have considered, that to have God's favour on their side, is to have the best of all preservatives of their prosperity, and the most effectual security against loss of any kind.

This case is similar to that of the thorny-ground hearer. "The cares of this world choke the word." Crowds of anxious thoughts fill all the chambers of the soul, so that no leisure is left for attention to the things of God. It is impossible to listen to messages from the unseen world, when the eye is distracted with the sights, and the ear with the sounds, of the world of sense. As well might a man listen attentively to a serious narration of facts, while a flood of water is being poured over him, as give ear to arguments addressed to the conscience, while harrassed with the worry of worldly business and care. "There was no room for Jesus in the inn." Neither is there room in a heart, which is already filled with the world, for the things of God. "Demas forsook the advocate of Christianity, having loved this present world." "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." The idea of adding a little more to the stock already gained is reckoned the cardinal end of life. The worldling indeed—

> "Throws up his interest in both worlds,
> First starv'd in this, then damn'd in that to come."

"His life is one long sigh for wealth; he would coin his life-blood into gold; he would sell his soul for gain." How many would sell their prospect of immortal happiness for a mess of pottage! (Heb. xii. 16; Matt. xxvi. 15; Isa. lv. 2; Luke xii. 18, 19; Prov. viii. 10.) The worldly spirit steals away the affections; it fosters a grovelling taste; and it hardens and enslaves the heart. It is the voice of wisdom that says, "Love not the world," etc.

4. **Those who stubbornly refuse to help on the Lord's side.** This applies to Meroz, of whom the prophetess intimates that by command of the angel of the

Lord a curse must be pronounced on them because, when they were so near the scene of the battle-field—only a little to the North—and it would have been so exactly in their way to have intercepted the enemy in their flight homeward, they seem, from some unaccountable reason, to have positively declined to give any assistance. When they might have turned the movement of Sisera's army into a disastrous retreat, such was their strange apathy, that a golden opportunity was lost to the sacred cause. "To whom much is given, of them much will be required." Whether it was a town occupied by Canaanites within the borders of Israel, or whether it was a place which, though belonging to Israel, was so steeped in idolatrous practices, that it had lost all regard for the name and the cause of Israel's God, we are not informed. But it seems to have been the latter. It is supposed that Meroz commanded a main pass among the hills, to the west of the Hermon range, through which a considerable portion of Sisera's army required to make their escape.

These people were virtually taking the side of God's enemies on the day of decision. They would rather give their sympathies to Sisera, the despiser of Israel's God, and the red-handed oppressor of His people, than to Jehovah, the covenanted King of Israel. This was an act of treason against Him, whom they had solemnly sworn to revere and obey as the one living and true God. Hence their guilt. Neutrality before God counts for opposition.

The curse on Meroz was not pronounced by Deborah out of any feeling of revenge on her part. Had it been so, we do not see how it could have been justified. But it is expressly announced that the curse was from "the angel of the Lord"—who acted as the "keeper of Israel," who calls them "my people," who "in all their afflictions was Himself afflicted," who gives a special charge to kings and others respecting them, saying, "Touch not mine anointed," and who added, "he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye." He is called "the angel, Jehovah," because He personates Jehovah, both in His tone of authority, and the prerogatives to which He lays claim (chap. ii. 1–5; Ex. xiv. 19; xxiii. 20; xxxii. 34, corresponding with xxxiii. 14, not xxxiii. 2; Josh. vi. 14, 15; Acts vii. 38; Mal. iii. 1). It was His sacred property, the people that represented Him, whom Sisera had dared to dishonour and to tread down as the mire, so that complicity with him on the part of the inhabitants of Meroz was a heinous offence. And this was the day of reckoning, when justice ruled the hour.

Cases of persons who stubbornly refuse to perform a sacred service for God's Church, which God in His Providence puts in their way, imply great guilt, and occur not infrequently. (Matt. xxv. 42, 44; James iv. 17; Matt. xxvii. 23, 24 and 26; Acts iii. 13, etc; Acts xiii. 45, also vers. 7–10; xxiv. 24–27; 2 Tim. iv. 14, 15; John xii. 42, 43, also 48).

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 13–23.

I. The mixed state of the church of God in the present world.

When God applies the winnowing shovel to His floor on this occasion, how many are found to have gone back from the covenant of their God! It is a melancholy fact, that so many false disciples should be found at every sifting time, wearing the same livery with the true. In every age, the "foolish virgins" walk with the wise. "Tares" grow in the same field with the "wheat." The dross is largely mixed with the jewels.

The thread of the church's history is, at no part, free from the coils of the old serpent, and his brood. "When the sons of God come together, Satan comes also among them." The children of the Wicked One associate themselves with the children of the kingdom. An Achan is found in the pure camp of

Joshua; a Cain in the family of Adam; a mocking Ishmael in that of Abraham; a Gehazi in the house of Elisha; and an Ananias and Sapphira in the pure society of the first Christian church. Even in the church under the pastoral care of the Apostle John, there were those of whom he said, "they went out from us, because they were not of us," etc. In Paul's days "many made shipwreck of faith." And even in the Master's own hallowed circle (though not undetected), there was one wrapped up in the thick folds of the cloak of hypocrisy—"Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

It is indeed, so common to hear of Christ being wounded in the house of His friends; and so frequently is the form of the wolf seen protruding from under the sheep's clothing, that one becomes staggered to know what to make of it. That men should every day be calling Christ, Lord, Lord, while yet they do not the things which He says, looks as if Satan were making a desperate effort to efface the distinction between Christ's friends and Christ's foes. But when, from such a paragraph as this, we find it has been so from the beginning, while yet that distinction is never lost, we are led to conclude that God but permits this confusion of characters to be made for a time, with a wise end in view. And the day is coming on when that line, which is often now so dim and imperceptible, will be made clear with the light of beams from His own throne. "Then shall men discern between the righteous and the wicked." Even now, we sometimes meet with a genuine character—one in whom is no guile—a man true as steel, about whom there is no mistake—who is the same whatever wind may blow, and whose hands and heart verify the sentiments and professions of his lips—a reliable, out-and-out Christian.

II. Many have no root to their religion.

Hence the reason why, "like the morning cloud and the early dew, it passeth away." The religion of several of the tribes was found wanting in this day of trial, because it had no foundation of principle. They appear to have had some sense of religious obligation, and rather gave the calls made on them the go-by, than openly questioned them. "They had no root in themselves, and so endured but for a time." There was no receptivity for the claims of religion. There was nothing in them to bear a severe strain when tried. Like reeds, they bent before the blast. Just as the plants must have a hold of the soil to be able to keep their places, when the winds blow around them on all sides, so men must have a firm grasp of religious truth with the heart, as well as the understanding, to be able to stand true, when there is nothing to encourage, but everything to shake, constancy.

This root, or firm setting in the soil, is that which many want in every age. They may have—

(1.) *Seriousness of religious manner*, but nothing more.

(2.) *Strict outward morality*, but nothing more.

(3.) *Punctual observance of religious duties*, but nothing more.

(4.) *Benevolence and amiability of disposition*, but nothing more.

(5.) *Great genius and high mental culture*, but nothing more.

(6.) *A good intellectual knowledge of the Scriptures*, but nothing more.

(7.) *Frequent religious impressions*, but nothing more.

The heart is so deceitful, that it will invent seventy times seven likenesses of true religion rather than once accept the reality.

III. The test of faith separates between the false and the true in religious character.

Those Israelites who stood on God's list of honour were, if any thing, men of faith. By this they were marked out from others. They believed in their God. Every thing about Him was to them sacred. Would they venture their lives for Him? Yes; they said they would even count life

less dear. Others said, no; that is too much to hazard. Would they leave their homes, and all that is dear there, perhaps never to return? Yes; for they loved their God with a deeper love, than that which they bore to father and mother, wife or children. Others said, that is a hard saying, who can hear it? Would they leave behind them all their property and gains, and let their worldly affairs take care of themselves, very likely to become deranged, if not entirely destroyed? Yes; they could do that too; indeed that never seems to have cost them a thought. Ah! but say others, it is surely madness to risk everything we have in the world. We might give a donation, or we might employ a substitute to do something for the good cause.

How different the two characters! The one founded on entire trust in the character of God, and some proper conception of His claims upon us. The other on a vague illusion which they call religion, but which in reality means nothing. The stupendous sacrifice which God makes for them, is not with them a matter of sincere belief, and helps them nothing in deciding how much they shall sacrifice for Him. Neither can they trust Him with anything, as children could entrust a loving father with all that is precious in the world from first to last, that he might look after it for them. The one class take everything from God on trust; they leave all decisions in His hands, believing that He will do all things right—be most kind, most just, most wise, and most true, in all that He decides for them; for *He is their God*, self given to them through Christ, even as they are self-given to Him. They live entirely *to* God and *for* God. For the other class this is far too thorough work. They cannot depart from the fundamental idea of living mainly to please themselves. Anything they give to God, of their affections, their work, their time, their worldly good, is merely a deduction from that, smaller or larger, but the foundation must be undisturbed. They do not believe in God, they believe in themselves.

Faith is a thorough test. Not only is God put on the one side, and self or the world on the other, when the soul is making its choice, but the world is set forward to the greatest advantage. It is seen, it is felt, it is present, and in every way the appeal is most strong to "flesh and blood." On the other hand; the things of God are unseen, are unfelt, and are absent. And in addition to this, "flesh and blood" must be subject to principles of righteousness and truth in the hands of a gracious Father. When the soul under these circumstances decides for God, it must be held to be thoroughly tested. This is faith.

IV. All who are enrolled on God's side are expected to do Him service.

The first practical lesson they learn is, "We are no longer our own." "We live to Him who died for us and rose again." "None of us liveth to himself," etc. (1 Cor. vi. 19; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15; Rom. xiv. 7, 8; vi. 13, 19).

V. All acceptable service to God must be cordially given.

First, Deborah, as a mighty heart gave herself with buoyancy and fervour to the work; the same spirit she infused into Barak. Barak and she together inspired the governors and men of Zebulun and Naphtali with like fervour. These again influenced Issachar, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin. The Saviour was "clad with zeal as a cloak." Cordial service will characterise the better days of the Church's history (Ps. cx. 3). In Nehemiah's days, the people "earnestly repaired" the wall; "they had a mind to work" (Col. iii. 23; 2 Chron. xxxi. 21).

CHAPTER V.—*Verses* 23–31.

THE MISERABLE END OF THE WICKED.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**23. Curse ye Meroz, etc.]** (See above p. 285.) No fellow creature may presume to pronounce a curse on another, at their own instance, from any cause whatever. This passage cannot be pleaded as an example, for the prophetess expressly declares it was the doing of the Angel-Jehovah. The sin was one of *omission;* but though it seemed to be nothing more than neutrality, it implied in reality covert sympathy with the enemy, and a real abandonment of connection with the covenant God.

24. Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, etc.] This is put in opposition to the curse on Meroz. Though only allied to Israel, and but a woman, she did most material service for God's Church in destroying its worst enemy (see on chap. iv. 11, 17, 18). The "*women in the tent*" refer to those in her circle of life—dwellers in tents, or shepherdesses. Women's fitting place is "the tent" (Prov. vii. 11; Titus ii. 5), as men's place is the battlefield. The name of her husband is also given, to distinguish her the better. **She is praised for making the fullest use of her opportunity.**

25. He asked water; she gave him milk, etc.] Put the verb in the singular, "*he asks—she gives.*" She must have known it was Sisera. For, on his first appearance, she hails him with the address, "Turn in, my lord, turn in; fear not." Then she covered him with the sleeping rug (chap. iv. 18, 19). And now when he asks water, she not only gives milk, but the best the house could afford. **She brought forth butter in a lordly dish.]** She carries him butter. חֶמְאָה—the more solid forms of milk—*curdled milk* (*Gesenius*); *cream* (*Lias*); *good superior milk* (*Keil*), who says the word is here synonymous with חָלָב or sweet, rich milk. סֵפֶל a costly bowl used by nobles—one reserved for distinguished guests. The Chaldee and Sept. render it *phial*, not a bottle, but a shallow drinking bowl.

26. She puts her (left) hand to the nail, etc.] or "*tent pin*"—the *peg* with which the tent was fastened. It was most likely of iron, like a nail driven into the wall (Isa. xxii. 23, 25). **And her right hand to the (heavy) workman's hammer.]** The mallet of the hand workers. חָלַם—she smites with the hammer, or *hammers Sisera, smites off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.* *Cassel* makes it, *she swings it over Sisera, smites his head, crushes through and transpierces his temples.* "He who sought to crush Israel with nine hundred chariots was himself crushed with one iron nail."

27. At (or between) her feet he bows, he falls, he lies down; at (between) her feet he bows, he falls; where he bows, there he falls down dead.] There is an accumulation of words in these two verses to express the deed now done, which marks it with special emphasis. Not that the perpetrator took delight in gratifying a thirst for revenge, but it brings out the thought, that he who had been so long the terror of Israel, now falls dead at a single blow. (*Keil.*) It is graphically rendered by *Cassel*—"*At her feet he curls himself and falls, at her feet he lies, curls himself again and falls; and as he curls himself again, falls—dead!*" Done too by a woman's hand!

28. The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, etc.] This falling of the curtain on the death-scene, and transferring the reader's thoughts the next moment to the gorgeous palace, to tell what is going on there, tends greatly to heighten the effect of the picture. An event so tragic in itself, viewed alone or from any point, becomes tenfold more terrible in the light of the awful contrast here presented. The abruptness of the transition, the appalling character of the contrast, the giving only of bold snatches of statement in the narrative, and leaving much for the imagination to fill up in its own way, all combine to render this one of the most effective dramatic representations it is possible to conceive. The word translated, "looked" means she *bent forward eagerly* in looking. Her son was accustomed to return a conqueror, and doubtless she thought he would so return now. But her thoughts seem to have troubled her. She must have heard something of the reports that went, that the mighty God of these Hebrews (of whom all the Canaanites knew but too well in the past), was on this occasion to put forth His power in fighting on their behalf, and if any thing were to occur like what took place in the days of Joshua, she felt there would indeed be reason for alarm. And another thing now disturbed her—the time for returning was fully come, but there was no appearance of her son, nor any tidings from the battlefield. She is in the upper airy room, standing at the window which commands a view of the road to a great distance. She looks keenly and listens, but no object is seen, and the rolling of the chariot-wheels is not heard. No triumphal procession fills up the view, but silence and solitude reign. In spite of her, a sad presentiment steals over the heart that all is not right. It was not accustomed to be thus. **She cries through the lattice.]** There is more of an anxious heart in that cry than she cares to acknowledge. "*Why does his chariot delay its coming? Why tarry the wheels?*" The "lattice" here is the opening through which the cool air is admitted.

"She cries."] It denotes feverish impatience, as if she had said, "Is he never coming?—why linger the steps of his chariot team?" How could she fail to be anxious, when he, the pride of his mother's heart, in whom her every hope was built up, who had brought such renown to her house, the invincible Sisera, before whom the wretched Hebrew people had cowered in abject submission these twenty years, not daring to mutter or to peep, was now so long behind his time in returning from battle, and not a single hint has been received regarding the issue of the great conflict? Can it be possible that a stone has been thrown across his path, or that a spoke has been lost to his wheel?

29. Her wise (used ironically) ladies] or *honourable ladies in waiting*—not *princesses*, as some make it; for Sisera was not king. These courtly sycophants are forward to offer their ingenious suggestions to account for the delay. It is caused by *victory*, not by *defeat*. What else in all reason could it be? With so vast an army, and Sisera at their head, how could it be otherwise? What other thought could be entertained? To scatter the down-trodden people would be but the work of a moment. It is the taking of an unusual quantity of spoil that accounts for their non-appearance. To search the bodies of the many slain, and to rob the homes of all their treasures must occupy time. The flattered mother allows herself to be persuaded, and her own second thoughts rise up within her to refute her first fears.

30. Have they not been entirely successful? Are they not engaged in dividing the spoil? To every man a damsel, or two damsels.] This allusion, especially as being put in the fore-ground when describing the expected booty, casts a sad reflection on the character of the speakers, themselves females, and also on the corrupt state of the age when such things were customary. It is similar to the picture given in the Iliad; and generally among those nations that knew not God. To Sisera, a booty of dyed (purple) garments—nay robes of double embroidery where gold and silver threads are woven upon the coloured ground.] On such a subject the female mind goes into minute details. "*Meet for the necks of the spoil;*" not, *made originally for the necks of the spoiled*, but now they are stripped of all; nor yet, *suitable to put on the necks of the spoil*, in reference to the rich garments sometimes worn by the captives; but, as in A. V. *costly clothing suitable to adorn the necks of the conquerors.*

In weaving such tinsel day-dreams as fancy might suggest, they fill up the time, and one hour succeeds another, when suddenly all is changed. A messenger of doom arrives, and brief but terrible is his report. The great battle is lost, Sisera's mighty army is destroyed; while Sisera himself has met with a tragic death, and that too at the hands of a woman! So the curtain falls! * * *

31. So let all thine enemies perish, etc.] The prophetess winds up with an expressive—Amen to the solemn visitation of God's Providence, on the heads of those who dare to oppose His holy designs. It is *prophetic* as well as *imprecatory*, implying *shall* as well as *let*. It is in harmony with such passages as Rev. xix. 3; 1 Cor. xvi. 22; Luke xvi. 25, 26, and those Psalms which invoke destruction on God's enemies. Such retribution is the appropriate reward of the incorrigibly wicked, and but for the great propitiation which has been made by Christ bearing the desert of our sins, it would still be the tone adopted by the God of Providence in all His dealings with men. But the language implies also the hopelessness of being able to fight against God and prosper, on the one hand, while on the other, those who have God upon their side shall march on their course after all trials and struggles are over, with the brightness and strength of the morning sun mounting up to mid-Heaven.

Jael's Act.

Was the conduct of Jael towards Sisera justifiable?

The deed of Jael towards Sisera, and that of Ehud towards Eglon, are so similar in character, that they must be justified on similar grounds. Much, therefore, of what has been said on the narrative in chap. iii. 15–30 will apply here (see p. 162–166). The case as regards Jael may be stated thus:—*In her conduct towards Sisera, she seems to have been guilty both of treachery, and of murder, while yet her deed and the circumstances attending it are highly commended by Deborah, when speaking under the influence of the Spirit of God.* Deborah is manifestly not speaking of herself. In verse 23, it is the voice of "the angel of the Lord," that is heard making use of Deborah as the medium for pronouncing the curse on Meroz. It was no feeling of Deborah's own that was expressed. Neither is the blessing, that was now pronounced on Jael, to be regarded as a thing done at her own instance. She was a prophetess, and was

acknowledged in this whole transaction by Jehovah, as the medium for conveying the intimations of His will. We cannot, therefore, doubt that the blessing now conferred on Jael was really from God, and signified not only that her act was excusable, but was even meritorious in His sight. Besides, it is admitted on all hands, that the Book of Judges forms part of the inspired canon. Why then except this portion of it? The measure of commendation is most marked—"*Blessed above women shall Jael be,*" etc. The circumstances are detailed in order, from verses 24 to 27, as if her conduct described in those verses was matter fitted to hand down her name to the praise of future generations, and the whole account is wound up with the expression of an earnest wish by the prophetess, that all God's enemies should in like manner perish. There can be no doubt that the prophetess regarded the death of Sisera, the enemy of God, as an act of which God approved. For the expression in verse 31, was practically saying—Amen—to Jael's act.

This fact, that Jael's conduct was approved by God, is sufficient to prove that it was not the ruthless act of a bloodthirsty woman. The account must be susceptible of some other interpretation. Sisera was not the personal enemy of Jael, so that the putting him to death could not be an act of personal revenge. As such, it could not have been approved of by God. Nor could it have been an act of pure barbarism, for that could not have been held up to the praise of posterity. It was indeed truly heroic, but, in Scripture, it is always the moral or religious aspect of a thing that renders it praiseworthy. At first sight, indeed, it seems to be the stronghanded act of one who has become ferocious, being stung to madness with a sense of the wrongs inflicted on her people and kindred, by the man who was now wholly in her power. In some such light do most commentators regard it:—

Jamieson says: "The taking of Sisera's life by the hand of Jael was murder. It was a direct violation of all proper notions of honour and friendship, and for which it is impossible to conceive Jael to have had any other motive, than to gain favour with the victors. It was not divinely appointed nor sanctioned. (How does the speaker know?); and the eulogy must be regarded, not as pronounced on the moral character of the woman and her act, but on the public benefits which God would bring out of it. Yet Jael's own name is distinctly held up to honour, and her act is circumstantially detailed in the text."

Fausset holds, that "Jael's sympathy with the oppressed, her faith in Israel's God, and her bold execution of her dangerous undertaking, deserve all praise; though, as in Ehud's case, there was the alloy of treachery and assassination."

Keil says: "Though Jael acted with enthusiasm for the cause of God, and from religious motives, regarded her connection with the people of Israel as higher and more sacred than either the bond of peace with Jabin, or the dealings of hospitality of her tribe, yet her heroic deed cannot be acquitted of the sins of lying, treachery and assassination." But how can we suppose that God would make use of means, which implied lying, treachery, and assassination to execute His holy purposes?

Lias denounces "the disgraceful treachery of Jael," and adds, "we need not suppose that, because Deborah sung, and sung under the influence of inspiration, we must therefore accept her judgment on a point of morals." Indeed! Is the weight of the Divine Spirit's testimony weakened by passing through a human medium? Can we suppose a person to speak under the influence of the Spirit of God, and yet be in error on a point of morals?

The *Speaker's Commentary* says, "Deborah speaks of this deed by the light of her own age, which did not make manifest the evil of guile and bloodshed; the light in our age does." Was this deed, then, one of bloodthirstiness?

The *Pulpit Commentary* calls it an act of patriotic treachery. Oppression rouses the dark passions of the oppressed. It was a case where cruelty was

rewarded with treachery. Being for the good of others, the act was less wicked than that which is entirely selfish in its motives."

Dr. Cassel terms it "a demon-like deed, done in the spirit of a woman's violence which knows no bounds. It also showed woman's cunning. Yet her motives were mixed. It would have been treason against the covenant of her house with Israel, had she spared Israel's sworn enemy. If spared he might have raised fresh troops, and continued to act as Israel's destroyer. The freedom of the sacred nation, with which she had cast in her lot, was now trembling in the balance, and so she makes her decision."

Edersheim calls her "a fierce woman with a dark purpose, and refers to the wild and weird character of the Kenites her people, as showing the instincts of a fierce race. To her every other consideration was nothing, so that she might avenge Israel, and destroy their great enemy." If this were Jael's real character, we do not see how it is possible for the Spirit of inspiration to have held her up, as one to be blessed by all future generations.

Far otherwise are we disposed to think of Jael and of her act. At the first glance of the case, it does appear surprising, that so many able and judicious writers should, when speaking of this case, have represented Jael as little better than a monster of wickedness, while Sisera is virtually assumed to be an unfortunate and very ill-used man. Even if Jael's act had been one of bloodthirstiness (which we decidedly believe it was not), are we to determine her character from that one act, done in a moment, under very peculiar circumstances, to have been ferocious and fiendish, while we pass over, and drop only a word of pity for her victim, though he had been guilty of bloodshed and atrocities of all kinds for the long period of twenty years, and that too over the breadth of a whole nation. True, the fact that Sisera should have committed a thousand murders does not justify Jael in committing one. But we protest against an unbroken current of condemnation coming down on the head of Jael for this one act, while not a syllable is said of a just retribution for the frightful villanies committed wholesale, by the wretch whom Jael now crushed.

Many considerations require to be taken into account in order to form a just estimate of Jael's conduct; some general, and some particular:—

I. General considerations.

1. The character of the times in which Jael lived. They were stern times; when in private life men had to "scorn delights and live laborious days," and in more public life it was customary to use bloody hands, and to look on with unpitying eyes. It was a time when oppression, cruelty, and murder were rampant in the land, and human life had lost half its value. "The ear was pained, the soul was sick with every day's report of wrong and outrage, with which earth was filled." And stern times lead to stern deeds. It was Israel's "iron age," and the "iron had entered into the soul." "Desperate evils lead to desperate remedies."

These Old Testament times were also days, when as yet the great means of propitiating the Divine anger had not been found, and when, in consequence, a certain aspect of severity characterised all God's dealings with men. The whole tone of life was more stern.

2. No breach of God's moral law can, under any circumstances, be permitted. Right and wrong have certain fixed boundaries in all ages, which are not removable. It can never be right to deceive, or to utter what is false. It must always be wrong to do murder. Treachery cannot at any time be justified. We dare not "do evil, that good may come." Neither can we act on the principle, that "no faith is to be kept with heretics." Nor may any creature of himself usurp the prerogative, of taking vengeance on a man for his sins against

his God, however glaring they may seem, unless he is specially commissioned by God to do so. It may be as clear as the sun, that the man is sinning with a high hand against his God, and deserves to be cut off for his sins, but his neighbour has no right, out of zeal for his God, to take the punishment of that man into his own hand. "Vengeance is mine! I will repay saith the Lord." The question is not, what does the man deserve? but, to whom is he responsible?

3. Look now at—The special character of Sisera's sin. That Sisera was counted a great sinner before God, and that his tragic death was a retribution sent upon him for his sin, there can be no manner of doubt. But what was the particular phase of his conduct that made his sin so heinous? It was not merely that he was a tyrant and an oppressor. It must always be remembered that the standard by which things are judged, in this stirring history of the times of the Judges, is not what is commonly used between rival nations when they have their victories or their defeats. Everything in the history of this people of Israel, was connected with *the honour of Jehovah before all the nations of the earth.* They were the people of Jehovah. By them and their history His name was known. To touch them for wanton mischief was to lay unhallowed hands on His sacred property. It was to meddle with His jewels—those whom He was bound to protect, as being employed to set forth the glory of His name in all the earth.

Of this the nations were fully apprised, from the days of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage onward. They were all duly informed by the wonderful history which God gave to that people, that His name and their name were inseparably bound up together, that what was done to them was done to Him, and that any act of dishonour, oppression, or cruelty shown to them, He, as the head feels for the suffering members, felt as done to Himself. That this people had many sins, and that for these sins, they deserved chastisement was indeed most true. But that did not alter the obligation of the nations to look on them as a sacred people to Jehovah, while He Himself so regarded them. If the jewels had got rusted, and required to pass through a process of refining, that was a matter for their owner himself to decide. But for others to oppress, and grind them to the dust, while they were regarded by Jehovah as His own people, and while they had the honour of His name to maintain on the earth, was to provoke Him to anger and awaken His jealousy for His Holy name.

Hence Sisera's sin consisted in the fact, that he, though fully warned as to the character of the God of Israel, and of the relation in which this people stood to their God, did yet, to serve wicked passions or wicked purposes of his own, dare to act as an enemy to Israel and therefore to their God, under whose protection they lay; he dared to touch God's property, God's jewels, God's children; he dared to give the worst of treatment to a people so sacred in the eyes of their God, to treat them with cruelty, oppression, and spoliation, and that for the long period of twenty years—and all this he did out of enmity to the God of Israel, and in bitter hatred to His name.

4. Another general consideration was that this was the day of final decision. The time of Israel's chastisement was over. They had been brought to repentance and renewed trust in their God; and, according to His promise, God arose for their deliverance. In the Person of the Angel-Jehovah, He takes His place at the head of Israel and their army. A summons is given to all to take their sides. Israel's God and His people are on the one side; Sisera and his large army are on the other. All who opposed Israel this day also opposed the God of Israel, and were counted by Him as His enemies.

Through all Israel it was known that this was a day for taking sides. From one end of the land to the other the call was heard, "Who is on the Lord's

side?" There was an express command for ten thousand men to follow Barak out of Naphtali and Zebulun, yet many more went of their own accord, for all volunteers were accepted. Nay, many who did not volunteer were reproved and put in the list of dishonour for their neutrality or indifference. But Sisera and his army stood in direct opposition. To sympathise with Sisera, therefore, or in any way to help him this day, by allowing him to escape, or otherwise, was to succour the enemy of the God of Israel when he was taking vengeance on him for his sins. It was, indeed, to take the side of God's enemy against God, when He was vindicating the glory of His great name. Hence the conduct of the people of Meroz was most daring. They allowed God's enemy to escape, while He was in the act of vindicating His character against His enemies.

II. These general remarks will prepare us for now looking at the **special considerations and motives** by which Jael was guided in acting the part which she did on this important occasion :—

1. She deeply felt the responsibility of her circumstances. She could appreciate the fact, that the battle was not merely between two human captains, but was really between the Angel-Jehovah and His enemies. She knew that God had now returned to His people, and that, through Deborah, He had given directions about the whole of this battle. She had heard of the terrific thunderstorm, and the mighty movement of the elements of nature against Sisera's host, the very "stars in their courses fighting against Sisera ;" and now here was the very man put in her way, against whom all this artillery of the Divine anger had been directed—could she, dared she, let him go in peace? It was no longer the day of forbearance ; it was the day of the Lord's reckoning with His enemies, when He was "laying judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet," when every loyal subject of His government, as well as every element in nature, was expected to act as an instrument in His hand to do the part assigned him to do in accomplishing the Lord's purpose.

Jael felt that she was now solemnly called on to make her decision, whether for the Lord, or for His enemy. This was, at the moment, the supreme consideration which overshadowed all other thoughts, and she felt that whatsoever sacrifices might have to be made, all other things must give way before it. In reply to the question thus imperiously put before her—Be for the Lord, or for His enemy—she goes wholly in for the name, and the people of her God, at the expense of violating the ordinary rules of hospitality, of having abuse poured on her name for the commission of a tragic deed, and of running the terrible risk of awakening the wrath of so powerful a king as Jabin, with whom too her house was at peace. But where the honour of her God was concerned, all other considerations were of no account. For this is she so highly commended. She did not seek this position ; it was a most trying one ; but it was forced upon her ; the alternative was put sharply before her, without the possibility of her avoiding it. The circumstances had to her the force of a call of duty, and she nobly rose with the occasion. But this was only one element in the case. We believe that—

2. She felt she was commissioned by God to put Sisera to death. It is not so expressly said in the narrative ; but many things must have taken place which are not expressly mentioned in the account given. It is the principle on which Scripture narrative is told, to give it in a very abridged form, with many details left out. The circumstance, therefore, of its not being mentioned in the narrative, is no proof that Jael was not commissioned of God to do as she did. On the other hand, had she not been so commissioned, her act must have been one of murder ; and had it been so, it could never have been held up to the admiration of posterity, as this deed undoubtedly has been. Jael's act also

corresponds with the now well known fact, that the Lord would "deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." Now when he had been thrown in her way, it may have seemed to her as if this was the finger of God's Providence pointing out her duty. That alone, however, could not have been regarded as a commission, it was but a confirmation going along with other things. Sisera's day was now come. It was the Lord's reckoning day with him for his oppression of His people. And all the arrangements made are of the Lord. The sword of Barak is turned against him, and all the instruments that might be of use in his destruction, all along the course which he took, are turned against him. The hailstorm, the lightnings, the winds, the waters of the district, especially the swelling of the brook Kishon, and now the house of a friendly tribe. Jael then felt she was obeying a Divine command in acting as she did. She must have been instigated by some "*instinctu Dei arcano*" to put Sisera to death.

3 She knew that Sisera was now devoted by Israel's God to destruction, at the hands of Israel. Sisera's destruction was synonymous with Israel's deliverance. It was really God's answer to their prayers. But it was also God's reckoning with His own enemy. The oppression and cruelty which this proud heathen had exercised towards Israel, though made use of by God for the chastisement of His people, was really meant in a very different sense by the oppressor. His only purpose was to bring down to a state of degrading servitude, or to entire destruction, a people whom he hated both in themselves and in their God. And this was done in the face of all the warnings which Jehovah had given to the nations, not to touch this people. At first God reserved His judgments. He made use of Sisera, first as a scourge to chasten His people; but now the time was come to deal with him as an enemy. The day of retribution for his great sin had come, and he must now know what it is to have the God of Israel for his enemy. Hence the announcement made to Barak was, "I will draw unto thee Sisera and his multitude, *and I will deliver him into thine hand.*"

This was virtually saying, that *his life was now forfeited to Israel by God's own arrangement.* It was not like the case of a man taking his chances of the battle in the open field. Sisera was now brought forth by God, that he might die for his crimes against Israel and their God. It was in some respects like the position of Cain, when he felt that everyone around him was at liberty to slay him. It is clear, that it could not have been wrong in Barak to put Sisera to death. But Barak only represented the nation, and what was said to him was virtually said to the whole of the oppressed people. What, therefore, was not wrong for Barak to do, could not be wrong for any Israelite to do. Sisera was now fighting against the whole nation, and their God. How could it be wrong in the nation, or any one in the nation, to fight against him? It was acting in self defence to do so, when his purpose was to reduce every Israelite to a state of bondage or death. Had Jael now spared him, how much future oppression and cruelty might have resulted to Israel from the act!

But though every Israelite had some justification, in taking action against Sisera on this occasion, on the ground of self-defence, the chief consideration which justified Jael's deed, was that Sisera was doomed to destruction for the public dishonour he had poured on Jehovah's name, by the treatment he had given to His people. This was a deeper criminality than that of common murder. It was a defiance of the God of Israel, a profanation of the great name—Jehovah, and treating with insult and cruelty wholesale the people who represented Him on the earth. Murder is taking the life of a fellow worm, but Sisera's conduct was an attempt to rob the great "I am" of His holy name! For this, sentence was virtually passed on Sisera by the Ruler of Providence, and he was delivered into the hands of Israel to receive a fit retribution for his sins.

4. We believe then that Jael's principal motive in this deed, was to vindicate the honour of Jehovah's name. and serve the interests of His Church in the world, by setting His people free from the yoke of the oppressor. Her act was done not to wreak any private vengeance of her own, but strictly in obedience to a Divine commission given to her, so that she was not at liberty to harbour Sisera, or to do otherwise than she did, for it was the day of the Lord's vindication of his own glory in the sight of the heathen. The very existence of God's cause on the earth seemed to require the death of this man, for had he lived and carried out his schemes successfully, the issue would have been the annihilation of that cause. Preferring the God of Israel to all other gods, she felt that by obeying the commission given to her, she was striking a blow for the redemption of His great and Holy name.

One question still remains—*Did Jael mean to deceive Sisera?* Why did she go out to meet him, and receive him in so friendly a manner into her tent? She must have known it was Sisera, and that he was a fugitive from the battle-field. For she must have watched with intense interest how the day went, and had the earliest information that could be supplied. She must have known it was Sisera, from having seen him on former occasions, and now he would very likely have given the information himself. Why did she bid him welcome to her tent, and even encourage him not to fear? Nay, why did she act so decidedly in showing him the rites of hospitality, and give him the best which her house could afford; and so offer the strongest assurance, which the member of a nomad tribe could give, that he was safe while under her roof? The chief difficulty is, that all these circumstances are detailed along with the tragic act, and on the whole put together, the blessing seems to be pronounced. Was all this really sanctioned by the Spirit of God, that now rested on Deborah? How can we possibly justify Jael in saying what she did not mean, or speaking falsely to gain the confidence of a man, when she meant to take his life.

If the narrative had been given in full, doubtless the difficulties would have been greatly relieved, if not entirely removed. As it is, some explanations may be given.

(1.) *It is not said that she agreed to tell the lie that Sisera put into her mouth,* in chap. iv. 20. She made no reply to his request.

(2.) *She acted according to the custom of her race in receiving him into her tent.* It was a fixed custom with the Arab races to show hospitality to strangers, especially when in very needy circumstances. "No one can repel with honour from the tent a stranger who claims hospitality, nor usually does anyone desire so to do." [*Pict. Bible in loco.*] But she seems to have impressed on his mind that he was secure while under her roof. How does this consist with her intention to put him to death? The only explanation is to suppose that—

(3.) *No intention to put him to death was yet formed in her mind.* This is not only possible but probable. How many surprises come upon her all at once! How proudly Sisera went forth in the morning! What a huge bannered host gathered around him! What a small army lay on Mount Tabor in opposition! How hopeless for them to cope with such a formidable host as those now collected by the waters of Megiddo! Yet but a few hours pass, and that mighty force of men ranged in battle array, the image of incalculable strength, melts away like the baseless pictures of a dream. A hundred elements as in a moment, come down upon them from all quarters, and a frightful and rapid destruction takes place. The army is utterly ruined, and the general is now a solitary fugitive, flying across the hills for his life. Now he appears full of terror, without a solitary attendant, hungry, weary, and athirst, glad to enter the most humble dwelling for refuge. What a series of striking surprises must Jael have experienced; first to have heard so much of the terrible disaster, and then to have seen the renowned captain of the great army himself at her very

threshold in such fearful plight? Is it at all likely, that she should, in a moment, with those mighty rocking changes going on around her, have formed any plot at all in her mind? Had she any time to weigh in her mind what was the best course to pursue in such unparalleled and altogether unexpected circumstances? Is it not far more probable that she would take the usual course adopted towards strangers *first*, and invite Sisera into her tent, giving him the usual rites of hospitality, and *afterwards* reflect more at leisure as to what was her duty to do. Having got a little time to reflect, all the circumstances, as we have described them, would rise quickly to her view, pointing to the death of Sisera—the enemy of the Lord and his people, "by the hand of a woman," as an event arranged by God Himself to take place in connection with the issue of the battle. At the same moment, by some Divine impulse, a commission may have been given her by God to execute the Divine sentence. This thought, that she was now under Divine command, would supersede all other considerations and lead her with calm purpose to inflict the fatal blow.

There seems, in fact, to have been *no premeditation* to bring about this death; and it is only in this way that we acquit Jael of treachery in her conduct. But, however we explain it, we believe that she herself felt at the time, there were overpowering reasons urging her to act as she did.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 28-31.

CONTRASTS IN THE DAY OF THE LORD.

I. Special days of the Lord are needed.

"Days of the Lord"—a phrase so often used by the prophets—are different from common days. They are days when God makes some striking manifestations of His true character, in correction of the erroneous and defective views into which men are ever falling, from the remarkable forbearance which he usually exercises towards them in his Providential rule. By some strong act or acts, God rises up and declares what is due to His own Holy name. Though on ordinary, as well as special occasions, He hates sin with a great hatred, He is by nature so "slow to wrath," that even when men sin against Him many times, and that, too, with a high hand, there are for a long while no signs that He is angry, or likely to inflict threatened punishment. He acts as one asleep; though all the time the motive is one of the richest mercy. He has no delight in the destruction, or the misery of His creatures. "He wills not that any should perish." His inclination is to give pardons to the penitent, rather than retribution to the incorrigible. Hence He waits long, without measuring out their due deserts to the wicked.

But men misinterpret the Divine silence, and wax bolder in sin. They begin to imagine that God is such an one as themselves, and is practically indifferent to their sins. They begin to regard His threatenings as a dead letter, or that, if they are still to be looked at, His mercies are so great, that they will not allow Him to proceed very far with the work of judgment. Thus they go on adding sin to sin, until the fear of God becomes dissipated before their eyes. There is a letting down of what is due to the name of God. Men get settled down in the idea, that God does not practically feel towards sin, as in His written word He declares He does; and, in their interpretation of the threatened penalty, they either greatly minimise its meaning, or cast it aside altogether.

Days of the Lord are thus needed for the vindication of the Divine character. His Providence must sometimes visibly go as far as His word. It must be seen

that He makes no abatement of His claims, because of His long silence, while His character must be cleared from the gross misconceptions which men have formed of it, from the long toleration extended to them in the past.

In the present case, a Day of the Lord was needed—

1. To bring men back to just views of what is due to God. (*a.*) *For the Israelites*, the long oppression of the Canaanites under Jabin, was a day of the Lord. Then God exhibited practically in His Providence, what He had long told His people so emphatically in His word, that He is a Jealous God, and is much displeased with the sin of their having any other God. He then showed that He could cast them off, notwithstanding His covenant; that He could go over to the side of the enemy, and fight against them, until they were not only defeated, but humiliated and crushed. Yet His faithfulness did not fail, for on their coming back to Him in penitence, He remembered His holy covenant. The end however was gained. They felt at last, and acknowledged it fully, that it was a terrible evil to depart from the living God, that He alone was to be feared and held in reverence, that all the gods of the nations were but dumb idols, while the God of Israel's favour was to them all in all. Their ideas of the sacred character of their God, of His majesty, holiness, loving-kindness, truth and justice, became raised to the old standard of highest reverence; and they owned, that His claims on the love and obedience of the whole heart, were His simple due.

(*b.*) *The oppressors also* had to pass through a very rigid discipline, in getting a rectification of their views of Israel's God. Long had they railed at His name, mocked His weakness, sneered at His laws and observances, and persecuted at will His people. But now what God so great in power as the Ruler of Israel, who is served by the very thunder and lightnings of heaven, by the sweeping whirlwind, and the rushing mighty waters! In the swift, overwhelming, and irremediable overthrow of the mightiest army which Canaan could produce, and that too through means of a mere handful of patriots, aided by the elements of nature, a grand demonstration was made of the fact that Jehovah was the only true God, and that He was infinitely superior to all other gods which the nations worshipped. Then men learned to say, "Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth, by whom the actions of men are weighed." "Let the God of Israel but arise, and His enemies shall be scattered; as smoke is driven, so are they driven; as wax melted before the fire, so do they perish. He cutteth off the spirit of princes; He is terrible to the kings of the earth."

(*c.*) *For all spectators of that generation*, how greatly was the standard of the fear of God raised! The shock of this mighty act was felt, not only through all Israel, but among all the surrounding nations. The God of Jacob whom they had begun so generally to despise, now rose up before all as the one great reality, amid a countless number of empty nothings. The whole earth kept silence before Him. There was no God that could deliver after this manner. With what a weight of sanction was the name Jehovah surrounded henceforth for all the men of that age! The shadow of the events of this day extended over forty years. Ps. ix. 20; lxxxiii. 18; xciv. 15; lxxviii. 65, 66; lxxiii. 20.

2. Such a day was needed to grant the promised deliverance to His people. The standing promise of Jehovah to Israel was, that He would be their God, and on this footing would secure them in possession of the land. For their sins, He acted for a time, as if he had forgotton this promise, and allowed the enemy to overrun the country, and practically to dispossess Israel of their own territory. But now they were penitent and earnest suppliants at His footstool, and it was in the spirit of the covenant, that He should return to them, when they returned to Him (Lev. xxvi. 40–45; Deut. xxx. i. 5). Hence a special

time was needed to make a public display of the Divine favour for this people, to prove that they had not been cast off, but that their God was faithful as ever to act the part of their Divine Protector, and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. "Though he visit transgression with the rod, yet He will not suffer His faithfulness to fail."

II. Contrasts of character and destiny in the day of the Lord.

1. **Those guilty of indecision on the day of decision.** The day of the Lord's decision was virtually a day when all things were taken according to the strict rule of justice. The acts or decisions made this day determined their character, and as they now showed themselves, so would they receive treatment in the future. The first case set before us in the paragraph is that of Meroz, who were specially noted this day as holding their hand, when they were called on in the most solemn manner to join in the discomfiture of the enemies of the Lord. They draw back undecided in the day of decision; and by that step they had their character fixed for the future. Though so strongly urged to decide, they yet showed no disposition to do anything; which proved in the most decisive manner, that they were not on the Lord's side in heart (see pp. 284, 285).

The destiny of such is to have *the curse of the Lord* resting on them—or to be "cursed with a curse"—*i.e.* emphatically cursed. As the effect of this curse, the city has long since ceased to be. Its very site is unknown. Its name has become unknown in history; and the only vestige of it which remains to tell that once it was, is this curse of the angel of the Lord, announcing that it should no longer continue to exist in God's world. Such is the fate of those who, however urgently dealt with by argument, yet doggedly refuse to devote themselves to His service. These people virtually turned their backs on the call which the God of Israel now made to them. And the higher the cause is which is to be served, the blacker is the treason which abandons it. Like the cursed fig tree, Meroz began at once to dwindle away.

2. **Those who are zealous for God at all risks.** This we believe was the spirit which Jael now exhibited. The principal motive, which influenced her to do the deed, was the Divine commission given her, and the end which she sought to gain was the glory of the Lord, in the breaking of the fetters upon His people, and the establishment of the reign of righteousness in the land. For this motive and end, kept steadily amid, doubtless, a conflict of many other motives, is she marked out for pre-eminent honour. It was at a moment of great peril that she decided, and this increased the virtue of her meritorious act. In any case, we dare not curse those whom the Lord has blessed.

The destiny of those who are ready to risk everything for God is, *to have a special Divine blessing resting on them.* As Jael highly honoured God by her conduct, so she is now highly honoured of Him. For the stand she made this day, her name has been preserved for everlasting honour, in the one really immortal Book of Time. Among all nations shall it become known, and wherever it is known, it will be with blessings heaped upon it. "Them that honour me will I honour." For the sake of one noble act, how many names have found a niche of honour in the Book of God! The good king *Melchizedeck*, who shows himself for one short hour, and then retires to the darkness; the unselfish *Onesiphorus*, who did the office of a faithful friend to Christ's servant in prison; the God-fearing *Obadiah*, who acted similarly by the Lord's prophets, in the perilous times of the wicked Jezebel; or, to take one case somewhat similar to that of Jael, *Phinehas*, the son of Eleazar, who, by one stern act, in a time of public sin, turned away the wrath of God from the people, so that they were not all slain (Gen. xiv. 18–20; 2 Tim. i. 16–18 1 Kings xviii. 13; Num. xxv. 7, 8).

3. Defiant enemies of the Lord, and their sympathisers. Such were Sisera and his mighty host, together with Sisera's household, who awaited his return. They all had a common sympathy in the humiliation of Israel, and in showing contempt for Israel's God. In Psalm lxxxiii. there is mention made of God's enemies combining together against His name, and His people alike—to cut off the latter, so that the very name of this people might cease (verse 4), and in doing this, they really wished to show their hatred against Israel's God. (verses 2–5, 12). Among these enemies, or rather as a parallel case to theirs, are mentioned Sisera and Jabin at the brook Kishon (verses 9, 10). The kingdom over which Jabin ruled had already felt the power of Jehovah's arm in the past, when Hazor and its king were utterly destroyed in the days of Joshua (Josh. xi. 10, 11). Besides this crushing blow inflicted on themselves, there was the long series of similar blows inflicted on all the other nations of the Canaanites, North and South, so that the true character of the God of Israel could not be misunderstood by them. Yet they dared to attack the people of God, among whom God had set His name, and wickedly treated them as slaves and the very refuse of the earth. Their custom probably was, and long had been, to blaspheme the name of Israel's God and strive to root it out of the earth. And now, on this special day, when it was given forth by public proclamation, that Israel's God was risen up out of His place to deliver His people, and that He was about to put Himself at their head to fight their battle, Sisera shows himself a defiant enemy to the last, by mustering a huge host to join issue with Israel's mighty king.

All such are necessarily *doomed to destruction.* They have decided to treat God as their enemy, and after due warning given, and forbearance exercised, the only possible issue of such a conflict is, to bring down the Divine wrath upon them. God sets His face against them, for a moment, and they are ruined. For who can stand before His anger? "He looketh on the earth and it trembleth; He toucheth the hills and they smoke. All that were now gathered against the Lord and His anointed, were driven like chaff before the whirlwind." "The enemies of the Lord became as the fat of lambs; they were consumed; into smoke did they consume away." (Ps. vii. 11–17; xi. 6) Sisera fled from the sword of Barak, and the nail in the hand of Jael did strike him through. (Job xx. 24).

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 28–31.

I. Crucial Testing-days are hastening on for all.

(1.) *In this world* there are certain times, when God in His Providence applies to every man's character a crucial test; when he is searched as with lighted candles, and the hidden state of his heart is made manifest. The very channels along which his thoughts flow, are seen and known by himself, if not by others, and he stands discovered before his own eye, as to the secret motives by which his conduct is regulated. All props are taken away, and he is left to stand solely on the foundation which he has really chosen. Then it is known whether he has really determined to be for God at all hazards, and whether he has cast in his lot with the Saviour, at the expense of having to renounce all other friends and refuges. Such a time occurs when he is visited with some dangerous illness, which brings him to the borders of the eternal world, and he feels how helpless fellow-creatures are, in view of possible death. It is also a testing season, when he meets with some severe reverse of fortune, when his worldly prospects are dashed, if not altogether blighted, and when his bright sunny hopes all fade like a dissolving view. Also, when for the first time he makes a

public profession of religion, and begins to wear Christ's Name. Also, when he is called on to choose his appropriate companionships—religious or irreligious. And once more, the time when he feels he must decide what habits he will form, those which imply self-denial and the fear of God, or those which include self-indulgence and love of the world, but without Christ and with the loss of a good conscience.

(2.) *In the great future.* We are informed that "after death is the judgment"—that when dead the beggar "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom,"—and that "the rich man in hell lifted up his eyes being in torment." We are also told, that the penitent thief was at death to "go with the Saviour into paradise," while of Judas we are told, that when he committed suicide "he went to his own place." Thus, it would appear, that at the moment of quitting this world, the soul has its sentence passed upon it, according to its character for good or evil. Also at the end of time, we are assured that "all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body," etc. Then "the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."

II. The prosperity of the wicked is short.

It seemed a great triumph for the King of Hazor to grind to the dust that once mighty people, who under Joshua, caused all the nations of Canaan to tremble, and all but annihilated the Hazor of that day. Now he could wreak his vengeance upon them at will, for many years, and doubtless looked forward to their final extinction under the iron rule of Sisera. "But He that sitteth in the heavens did laugh, the Lord had them in derision." How soon is "the candle of the wicked put out." "He was great in power, and did spread himself like a green bay tree." The day of the Lord comes round. "And he has passed away, and lo, he is not; yea he is sought for, but he cannot be found." "How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors." Yet these men but yesterday were "compassed about with pride as a chain, their eyes did stand out with fatness, and they did set their mouth against the heavens."

When they think themselves secure from evil then suddenly destruction comes. They do not "watch" nor "number their days." Witness Belshazzar, Herod, and "the fool" in Christ's parable. How quickly did Abel's blood cry for vengeance! and that of Naboth in Jezreel the moment that Ahab went to take possession! Jeroboam was stricken while he spoke (1 Kings xiii. 4). "The pleasures of sin are but for a season."

It is a remarkable fact that in the history of Rome, beginning with the period after the Augustan era, over 500 years, as many as 74 emperors came to the throne, of whom only 19 died a natural death and 55 were murdered—having an average reign of 6½ years only for each!

"*The prosperity of fools destroys them.*" It is because some men are so prosperous, that their life is more brief than otherwise it would be. Prosperity *exposes to envy and hatred;* and to this cause more than to any other did the wearers of the Imperial Purple at Rome hold their short tenure of office. Sometimes the same man will touch the greatest height of prosperity, and the lowest depth of misery, within the space of a few hours. Henry the Fourth of France, when in the zenith of his power, was struck by a blow from a traitorous hand, and despatched in his coach; while his bloody corpse was forsaken even by his servants, and lay exposed an unseemly spectacle to all. There seemed indeed, but a moment between the adorations, and the oblivion, of that great prince, "all flesh is grass."

Prosperity also often leads to *habits of self-indulgence*, which speedily terminate in death. Thus Alexander the Great, could conquer the world, but could not subdue his own evil passions, and quickly they conquered him. We

knew a man who was accustomed to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow for many years. Suddenly, through the death of a friend, he came into the possession of a large fortune. He gave up his habits of industry, got into the hands of evil companions, who led him rapidly on the down hill path, and, though in the prime of life, within two years, he was laid in his grave.

III. His supreme folly.

How inexpressibly foolish is it for a man, who has the power of casting his thoughts into the future, and foreseeing the consequences of his acts, to spend a short career of some twenty years like Sisera, in acting the part of a proud tyrant over a helpless people, at the risk of incurring the wrath of that terrible God, who he knew, if it pleased Him, could at any moment rise from His place and consign him to irremediable destruction! "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!" How can it fare with him that striketh against a rock, but that his bones should be broken, and his purpose utterly fail? "Who hath hardened himself against God and hath prospered?" What infatuation is it for men, when they get a brief moment of power, to rush against the "thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler!" With one ray of that supernatural glory with which He was surrounded, could the ascended Jesus, now at the helm of universal government, and having infinite power at His command, have consumed the proud horseman that was on his way to Damascus to persecute those whom the Saviour loved. Yet the worm dares to rear itself against an Omnipotent arm! In tones of pity it is whispered to Him that it is hard to strike against the solid rocks!

In the grey mist of an early summer morning, a troop of horse are seen stealing over a stretch of Scottish moorland, among the moss-hags and wild heath, when suddenly they came on the object of their search. John Brown, of Priesthill, had just finished earnest and fervent prayers with, and for, his family circle, showing more than usual of the wrestling spirit, and had gone to a little distance from his home to begin work for the day. He was taken back to his house, and in the presence of those most dear to him, was told by the bloody Graham of Claverhouse to go to his prayers, for instantly he must die. The most inoffensive of men, most loyal to his God, most just and true in his dealings with his fellow men, with nothing to lay to his charge, but the one circumstance that he dared to worship God according to his own conscience, is told by a representative of law and order, that, for this great offence, he must die, and at a moment's notice! The command was given to fire—but not a hand was moved to do the work. The callous-hearted leader then himself walked up to his victim, and shot him through the head! The cruelly-used widow put to him the stinging question—"How will you answer in the future for this day's work?" to which he replied—"To men I can easily answer, and as for God, I shall take Him in my own hand!" We mention this incident, because the names of Sisera and of Claverhouse are fit to be associated together on the same page; and to show the supreme infatuation of both in running such a monstrous career of wickedness, and raising fearful clouds of wrath against them in the future, with scarcely even a shadow of recompense in the present.

IV. His present misery. We cannot think that Sisera could have been a happy man, even at the head of his magnificent army, with myriads of warriors ready to obey his word of command. There was always the consciousness that he was engaged in the work of bloodshed, or trampling down the rights of others—that he was carrying bitter grief or absolute desolation into the homes of a nation, and that he was running up a fearful reckoning with the God of the Hebrews, if He should ever rise up and call him to account. It is impossible to have any pure happiness within a man's

inner nature, while there is a giving way to the darker and viler passions of the heart. Hence it is said, "there is no peace to the wicked." Even at the best, there are snares in all their mercies; curses, also, and crosses attend all their comforts; and the curse of God follows them in every avenue of wickedness. They carry about with them their prison wherever they go, so that they are always in chains. And when any sudden flash crosses their path, or when any threatening sound makes itself heard in their ears, they feel as if the messenger were on their track, that is sent to summon them to appear at the bar of the Judge. It is but a troubled happiness which the wicked man has at the best: he draws it from impure springs, and he is liable to be robbed of it, at any moment, by forces over which he has no control.

V. His preparation for future misery.

(1.) *He lives in the neglect of the great end of life.* He has no aim in life but that of living for his own pleasure or profit. There is no ever-present conviction with him, that he has to spend his time chiefly for God, and that he is responsible for doing the many duties which God has set before him in His word.

(2.) *He is every day provoking God to anger.* By direct and positive acts of sin, or by many omissions in the discharge of duty. By forgetfulness of God, casting off His fear, and in many ways by listening to the world, instead of diligently hearkening to the voice of His word. By banishing God from his thoughts, as far as may be, and giving his affections to a thousand other objects rather than to the greatest, kindest, and best of Beings.

(3.) *By delaying to take up the great question of the soul's reconciliation with God.* Every hour's delay of this great matter is a slight put on the infinite sacrifice which God has made on men's behalf. It is making light of the offer of boundless love. It is this, which under the name of unbelief, or not believing, is said to form the main ground of men's condemnation in the gospel record.

(4.) *Because he is always adding to his account before God, without in any way reducing it.* Though, as time passes, he begins to forget the old sins, not one of them is really disposed of, while he hesitates to accept of God's terms of reconciliation. When a man is hard pressed for money, and is on the verge of bankruptcy, he gets his bill renewed, but he well knows, that this is not a real payment; and, if it should be renewed again and again, there is still no payment made but only more interest added to the capital, making the debt larger and larger. Thus is it always till the Saviour is really embraced, and the debt is finally and really paid, on condition that the sinner gives himself entirely into His hands.

(5.) *Because he is wasting on trifles the time which should be given to the saving of his soul.* It is as if a man were to cut down, into chips, a strong oaken plank which is thrown to him to enable him to get across a yawning gulf, when there is no other means of escape. Is it wise for a man to busy himself in painting the door, when the house is on fire? or to spend much time at the toilet, when he is not sure whether his head shall stand on his shoulders another day? Is it fit that he should spend all his care in deciding what kind of dress he should wear, and to neglect a deadly cancer that has already begun to eat into his vitals?

(6.) *Because he puts worldly enjoyment in the place of the enjoyment of God.* Of worldlings it is said, "they take the timbril and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ; they spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave." But there is "no fear of God before their eyes," and no love of God in their hearts. "They do not submit themselves to the righteousness of God." "The world is in their hearts." God will not dwell in hearts where the world is on the

throne. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." By allowing a usurper to reign over them, the wicked thus banish God from their presence, and when they cross the boundary line between the present and the future world, that condition becomes fixed, and so they remain for ever under the misery of being banished from God, the fountain of all life and joy.

Thus he carries with him the seeds of future misery wherever he goes, in his ungodly habits and preferences, superadded to his acts of transgression, or his omissions of the performance of duty. His only future must be to be deprived of all the smiles of his God, and to lie under His frown. This is misery.

VI. The wicked's fearful end. "I saw the wicked buried," says the wise moralist—and he might have added (1.) I thought of his *fair beginning*—the good start he made in life; a bright morning, full of promise; a buoyant heart and mind full of joyful anticipations. (2.) Next of his *brilliant opening career.* How he made several decided successes, as he entered into public life; how the world came around him with its smiles; how the tide of good fortune flowed to him; how he was flattered on every side, and marks of distinction were freely conferred. (3.) Then I thought of *the insidious influence of so many smiles and flatteries;* of the danger of carrying so full a cup of temporal good things; of the many snares that Satan planted in his path; and of the persistent temptations with which on all sides he was surrounded. (4.) I thought how, a little farther on in his career, he had already *become the slave of* "*divers lusts and passions* which war against the soul;" how he had turned a deaf ear to the warning voice of wisdom; how he had forsaken the uphill path which conducts to life and to God, and had chosen to turn aside into the by-paths and flowery meadows of sin, while fortune yet showered her favours upon him with lavish hand. And finally (5.) I thought how *rapidly he had descended* from a lofty height into the valley of years, to fall among the thorns and quagmires that lie at the close of a worldling's life. I thought of his desertion by the world, his abandonment by God, his being "held by the cords of his sins," his being the prey of an accusing conscience, and at last entering the dark Jordan, without any provision made to save himself from foundering in the sullen waters.

1. At the best his career ends in vanity.

In some form or other, he substitutes the world for God, which in the nature, of the case, must terminate in vanity.

"'Tis no hyperbole, O man, if thou be told
You delve for dross, with mattocks made of gold.
Affections are too costly to bestow
Upon the fair-faced nothings here below.
The eagle scorns to fall down from on high
(The proverb saith) to pounce upon a silly fly;
And can a Christian leave the face of God
T'embrace the earth and dote upon a clod?"

"The Romans painted Honour in the temple of Apollo, as representing the form of a man, with a rose in his right hand, a lily in his left, above him a marigold, and under him, wormwood, with the inscription *(Levate)* 'consider.' The rose meant that man flourishes as a flower, and soon withers; the lily denoted the favour of man, which is easily lost. The marigold showed the fickleness of prosperity. The wormwood indicated that all delights of the world are sweet in execution, but bitter in retribution. Consider what a lesson of vanity is here?"

"What a deal of pains doth the spider take in weaving her web to catch flies! She runneth much, and often up and down, hither and thither; she wastes her own body to make a curious cabinet, and when she hath finished it, in the twinkling of an eye, the sweep of the besom brings it to the ground, destroying herself and it together, with one stroke. Thus it is with worldly men. They carp and care, toil and moil in this world, which they

must soon leave for ever. They waste time and strength to add heap to heap, when quickly all perishes, and they, too, often along with it."—*Swinnock.*

2. Often it ends in anguish.

(1.) It comes *unexpectedly.* "As a thief in the night—while they are saying, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh." While the mind is weaving webs of schemes, while many agencies are set to work, and a great object in view is on the point of attainment; while a great acquisition is about to be made, and a higher platform is almost gained—at this particular moment, when least expected, the last messenger brings His summons, "Thou fool! this night thy soul is required of thee." "At midnight a cry was made, Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him."

A bright morning broke for Sisera over the hills of Israel. Expectation rose high as he surveyed all the plain covered with masses of troops—sword and spear, helmet and buckler, the image of colossal strength. The subject nation would become more prostrate than ever; never would victory be more easily won. There was only one issue possible, when such a huge host were to be met by only a handful of undisciplined volunteers under a man who was no general. Golden dreams of new accessions to former glory filled the brain of the great commander, as he marshalled his troops along the banks of the Kishon, while the sun rose high in the heavens. Three or four hours elapse, and that magnificent spectacle of living power becomes one vast Aceldama, while the vaunting general himself is reduced to the plight of running as a fugitive before the pursuing foe, and escaping death on the battlefield only to meet it more ignominiously, at the hands of a woman!

The unexpected character of this end reminds us of the capricious cruelty of the insignificant puppet, who ruled over the millions of ancient Persia (Xerxes), who sometimes crowned his footmen in the morning, and beheaded them in the evening of the same day. Also, the Greek Emperor, Andromachus, who crowned his admiral in the morning, and took off his head in the afternoon! "How are they brought unto desolation as in a moment? They are utterly consumed with terrors."

(2.) It comes *irresistibly.* God is Almighty to punish the incorrigible, as well as to pardon the penitent. "The sinner has not a friend on the bench on the day when he is summoned to the highest tribunal. Not a single attribute will be his friend. Mercy itself will sit and vote with its fellow-attributes for his condemnation." When his time is come, "the wicked is driven away in his wickedness." "He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found; yea he shall be chased away as a vision of the night." No more power has he to keep back his spirit in the day when God requireth it of him, than has the dry leaf power to defend itself against the rushing tempest. When death comes his soul is forced from him by power of law. "His soul is *required* of him." "As a disobedient debtor he is delivered to pitiless exactors; or as a ship which is dragged by some fierce wind from its mooring, and driven furiously to perish on the rocks."—*Theophylact.*

"In that dread moment, how the frantic soul
Raves round the walls of her clay tenement,
Runs to each avenue, and shrieks for help,
But shrieks in vain! how wistfully she looks
On all she's leaving, now no longer hers!
O might she stay to wash away her stains,
And fit her for her passage! But the foe,
Like a staunch murd'rer steady to his purpose,
Pursues her close through every lane of life,
Nor misses once the track, but presses on;
Till forc'd at last to the tremendous verge,
At once she sinks to everlasting ruin!"

"Terrors take hold on him as waters; a tempest stealeth him away in the night. The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth; and as a storm hurleth him out of his place. For God shall cast upon him and not spare. Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place." On this occasion, Sisera was "chased as the chaff of the mountains

before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind."

(3.) It makes *a mockery of hopes.* "Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations: they call their lands after their own names." "But the expectation of the wicked shall perish. Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them. Their breath goeth forth and they return to the earth; in that very day their thoughts perish." What a mockery did the act of Jael make of all the hopes cherished by the proud leader of the myriads that deployed on the plain of Jezreel! As dreams of the night they vanished away. Like the illusions of the mirage with its visions of silver streams and laden fruit trees, which disappear the moment the enchantment is broken, so is it with the miserable worldling, whom Satan has duped with the hopes of the honours and joys of earth in days to come. Every hope perishes. Bitter "disappointment remains their only comforter." "Dust is the serpent's meat," and the same fare have all the serpent's seed.

How can it be otherwise? To the wicked man who clings to his wickedness,

> "No ray of hope
> Dispels the involving gloom; a Deity,
> With all the thunder of dread vengeance 'round him
> Is ever present to his tortured thoughts."

Notwithstanding all the diligence and cost, all the art and industry, which the wicked put out in order to perpetuate their names, their hope is, like the spider's web, which at one stroke of the besom is brushed away, and in a moment it comes to nothing. "A great king, feeling that he was about to be approached by a greater monarch than himself—the king of Terrors—gave orders that when he died he should be put into a royal position, sitting in the attitude of a ruling monarch. In a mausoleum specially erected for the purpose, and in a tomb within this, he was placed upon a throne. The Gospel narratives were laid upon his knees; by his side was his celebrated sword; on his head was an imperial crown; and a royal mantle covered his lifeless shoulders. So it remained for 180 years! At length the tomb was opened. The skeleton form was found dissolved and dismembered; the ornaments were there, but the frame had sunk into fragments, and the bones had fallen asunder. There remained, indeed, the ghastly skull wearing its crown still—the only sign of royalty about this vain pageant of death in its most hideous form."

(4.) *There is no mixture of comfort with misery in their death.* When death comes to the wicked the day of mercy closes, and with it all that mitigated the bitter cup of life is taken away. God ceases to smile, and all creature sources of happiness become as wells dried up. In God's frown the whole universe joins, for all are His servants. Sometimes, on this side of time, the dark shadow of the eclipse steals over a man; and, as in the case before us, we see him entering the turbid waters without a single reliable friend to lean on, and without a ray of hope to lighten the gloom. The day of forbearance lasted long; it is now over, and there is no longer mercy mingled with justice. He who would contend with the Almighty at all risks, must now accept the results of his own decision. "The wicked man must now eat of the fruit of his own way, and be filled with his own devices."

Those who abuse the day of mercy often die without a single friend to whisper peace at their pillow, or to supply a single consolation in the hour of need. There is no Christian friend to point them to the Saviour, to offer up prayer to Him who is able to save from death and all its consequences—to show marks of sympathy, to close the eyes in death, and take charge of the poor body when the spirit has fled. And yet this is but a trifling element in the case, compared with that which is implied in doing the office of a mediator, when the spirit quits its clay tenement to answer in the presence of the Judge for the deeds done in the body. It will then be every thing for a man

to have provided a "Day's-man" to answer to God for him, and to produce reconciliation between an offended God and His offending creature. It is the highest wisdom now to make this provision without the least delay. "The prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself."

(5.) *It comes with marks of dishonour and degradation.* That the most renowned warrior of his age should die at all when he had so many legions to defend him—that he should not be able to fight a stroke on the battle-field—that he should die as a fugitive, all alone without any of his chosen friends near him, in the dwelling of a supposed friend but a real enemy, above all, that he should die a tragic death at the hands of a woman!—all this indicated a marked degree of dishonour and degradation in his death. "Save me from the horrors of a jail," were almost the dying words of one of the most gifted men of genius. A profligate nobleman in England, who long stood on a lofty pinnacle in the world of fashion, and was master of an income of the value of £50,000 per annum, became at length reduced to the deepest distress by his vice and extravagance, and breathed his last moments in a miserable inn, forsaken and forgotten by his former companions. In a similar manner died one of the greatest statesmen whom England ever produced—in a small country inn, without a single attendant or comforter, though at one time whole nations were entranced by his eloquence. Now, in this humble dwelling, with none to care for him, or sympathise with his sorrows, he dies of a broken heart! Another bright genius, who long gained the most flattering distinctions in society, writes in old age, "I am absolutely undone and broken hearted. Misfortunes crowd on me, and I die haunted by fears of a prison. Forsaken by my gay associates, dispirited and world-weary, I close my eyes in gloom and sorrow."

"Life ebbs, life ebbs, and leaves me dry,
As the hot desert, empty as the wind,
And hungry as the sea."

How many leave the world thus "fallen, fallen from their high estate," who have lived without God, and without Christ while they did live! "Shame shall be the promotion of fools." At the last "some shall awake to shame and everlasting contempt," and even during the present life there are not wanting illustrations.

(6.) *It comes as an absolute ruin.* It is the hour when every thing that a man has becomes lost, finally and absolutely lost—his property, his friends and relatives, his fame, his character, his works in this life, and all his prospects for the life to come! He stands between two worlds, a ruined and helpless man, no friend near, and an angry God for his enemy—all brought upon him by himself! It is of all sights the most wretched. Warning was given that the "judgment though long deferred lingered not, and the damnation slumbered not." And now he is in the hands of irresistible forces, which inflict upon him a terrible humiliation and utter ruin. God sets his face against him in vindication of His holy law, which he has so deeply transgressed; and now rebukes him in the fearful but just language of Prov. i. 24–30.

His end is ruin. Every thread of life's schemes is broken; warp and woof together are all torn to shreds. Not a vestige of life's doings remains to serve as a memorial of the past—nothing save what may serve as material for an accusing conscience. Now the "rains have descended, the floods have come, the winds have blown and beaten against such a man's house; it has fallen and great is the fall of it!" There was no foundation of rock. He tries to lean on the house which he has built on the sand, but it does not stand; he holds it fast, but it does not endure. It is like a man standing upon ice, or on slippery, shelving rocks. It is now discovered, that during life the wicked man had been carrying omens of sad import in his breast; that, though he stood well before men, he was like a book that is well bound externally,

but when opened was found to be full of tragedies.

What a frustration of plans and purposes do we see in the example before us! How many webs were being spun in the loom of fancy, at the time when the awful catastrophe took place! How many vain hopes were buried in that unknown grave! The greatest warrior lies down as the beasts that perish; and there is no blessed resurrection. The name is forgotten, or lives to rot above ground as a warning to others. His destiny otherwise is to be forgotten. (Eccl. viii. 10; Ps. xxxvii. 10, 36, 38; xlix. 19; Prov. xxiv. 20.)

Melancholy as are these examples of spiritual shipwreck, they will, we believe, form but a small minority in the whole population of the globe at the end of time. If the number of the saved did not greatly exceed the number that shall perish, where would be the victory of "the Son of God in coming to destroy the works of the Devil?" Also, now that a highway has been opened, clear of all obstruction for sinful man to come back to God, where would be the broad evidence that "God will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth?" Meantime the Saviour Himself warns every man to strive earnestly for his own salvation, rather than enquire curiously about the number of the saved. (Luke xiii. 23, 24).

N.B.—**The Church in every age has its songs.**

The bow of hope that is set over its future is the bow of an everlasting covenant, and gives assurance against devastation in the future. The well whence its contents are drawn is deeper than can ever dry up. The army that is engaged to defend it night and day is incomparably mightier than the united force of all that are in league against it. When faith is strong, its bright days always exceed in number those that are dark; in the hardest struggle it is never more than brought to its knees, and in the end it never fails to come off "a conqueror, and more."

Much of its vocation, therefore, even in this world is to sing; and its songs are lyrics rather than elegies. Its days are never so dark as to be altogether without stars, and therefore not without songs. In the times of Genesis, the Church was scarcely yet old enough to have a history, but the Book does not close until we have a prophetic song on the brightness of her future career (Gen. xlix.). Then says Wordsworth, "We have a song of victory in Exodus (chap. xv.); we have a song of victory in Numbers (chaps. xxiii. and xxiv.); we have a song of victory in Deuteronomy (chap. xxxii.); we have this song of victory in Judges; we have a song of victory in the First Book of Samuel (chap. ii); we have a song of victory in the Second Book of Samuel (chap. xxii.); we have also the song of Zacharias, that of the Virgin, that of Simeon, in the gospel narrative; and all these songs are preludes to the new song, 'the song of Moses and of the Lamb,' which the saints of the Church glorified from all nations, will sing at the crystal sea, when all the enemies of the Church shall have been subdued, and their victory assured for ever" (Rev. xiv., xv.). He might have added that from the days of David more than one-half of all the sacred writings of the Church of God is in the language of song—David and others in the Psalms, and Isaiah and others in the writings of the Prophets. If the subject is not that of victory, it is for the most part that of victory in the days to come, as not less certain than if it had been already accomplished.

CHAPTER VI.

ISRAEL'S RELAPSE INTO SIN, AND THEIR OPPRESSION BY THE MIDIANITES.

Verses 1-10.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Did evil, etc.]** Not *continued* to do evil, though that is implied (pp. 158, 186). Deborah and Barak were now dead, and their personal example, the influence of their names, and their warning voices were all buried with them. The shake given to the idolatry of the land by the signal manifestation made of Jehovah's jealousy had now lost its effect, and a new generation had sprung up. That so long a period as 40 years should have been influenced by the shadow of the great event of the destruction of Sisera and his army shows that a mighty impression had been made of the character of Israel's God, both on Israel themselves, and also on the nations around them. All seemed to feel that "great fear was due to the God of Israel," for "there was no God that could deliver after this manner." The hand of Midian—descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen. xxv. 2). Though not the same race, they appear to have been in close affinity with the Ishmaelites, or were included among that people as a part is included in the whole (chap. viii. 22-24). With them, too, they appear to have been engaged in the carrying trade across the desert between the Euphrates and Egypt (see Gen. xxxvii. 25, 28). Some regard the word *Midianites*, as the plural of the old Egyptian *Madi* [*Fausset*]. They were a nomadic people and did not till the ground, but lived in tents. They occupied a belt of desert land, extending from Horeb in a line extending north-east, passing Moab on the east, and skirting the territory of Reuben. While Moses was at Horeb, he dwelt with his father-in-law, Jethro, who was the priest of Midian. Their territory, therefore, must have been, at one side, near by Horeb. But being unsettled in their residence, and predatory in their habits, there was probably no very strict delimitation of the boundary lines. *Wiseman* calls them "wandering corsairs" of the desert. The disposition to plunder had become to them almost a natural instinct, as it was with all the tribes of the desert. They had an old grudge against, Israel on account of the crushing blow that had been inflicted on them in the time of Moses by the express command of God, because of their having wickedly enticed Israel into sin on the plains of Moab (see Num. xxv. 1, 6, 16-18; xxxi. 7-12; xxii. 4-7). Quite 260 years had elapsed since that sweeping desolation had passed on them; and now they had recovered their strength, but cherished an undying hatred to their destroyers. They would be readily joined in their raid against Israel by the Amalekites (see p. 158), by the Ishmaelites (Ps. lxxxiii. 6, 7), by the Arabs and wandering hordes generally, along the south and south-east border of Palestine, who were always ready for any work of pillage. The initiative, however, was taken by Midian.

Cassel thinks that the two words *Midian* and the more modern *Bedouin* are really one and the same—the Hebrew spelling beginning with מ, while the Arabic language begins with ב. In this last case the word would spell *Bidian*, or *Bedouin*. In the Semitic languages there is a constant interchange of these letters. The word comes from a root signifying *the desert*.

2. The hand of Midian prevailed.]—*bore heavily upon them* (p. 97). They had no power to remove it. They made them the dens which are in the mountains, etc.] Some *(Keil)* make the word (מְעָרוֹת) to signify "*mountain ravines*," hollowed out by torrents; being thus found they were fitted up by men's hands in such a manner, as to make suitable retreats from danger. Others *(Cassel* and *Bertheau)* understand by it, "*Light holes*," *i.e.*, holes with openings for the light, or *grottoes*. *Wetzstein* says, "At some elevated dry place, a shaft was sunk obliquely into the earth, and at a depth of twenty-five fathoms, streets were run off straight, from six to eight paces wide, in the sides of which the dwellings were excavated. At various points these streets were extended to double their ordinary width, and the roof was pierced with air-holes according to the size of the place. These were like windows. Hence the meaning is, *caves, with air-holes like windows*. Watchers were employed to give the alarm when the enemy approached. Then the ploughmen and herds hurried quickly into the earth and were secure. There was also a second place of exit, for the most part." Similar must have been the rock dwellings of Petra. In the limestone mountains of Palestine, there are many natural "*caves*," but these generally were more fully excavated, and fitted up artificially, when used as human dwellings. The remaining word (מְצָדוֹת) signifies *fortresses*, or (mountain) "*strongholds*." These refuges were less used for purposes of personal safety, than as places of concealment for property and necessaries of life. For the propensity of the Bedouin always has been rather to pillage than to kill (1 Sam. xiii. 6; xxiii. 14, 19, 29; 1 Chron. xi. 7) These were memorials of the dark times, when the Bedouin host like an over-running flood swept over the land. Sin like a leprosy leaves its scars and its baldness behind it.

3. Children of the East.] This phrase seems to designate the various Arab tribes, not otherwise named, who roamed over the open country between the Red Sea and the Euphrates. We hear of "the men of the east" (Job i. 3); "the mountains of the east" (Num. xxiii. 7); "the east country" (Gen. xxv. 6); "the east" specifically (Gen. xxix. 1). (Isa. xli. 2; Matt. ii. 1; vii. 12; viii. 10). These hordes seem to have had no design of conquering the country, nor yet of cutting off its inhabitants. Their object simply was plunder. "Their visits were like the incursions of the Picts and Scots into Southern Britain during the latter part of the Roman dominion (A.D. 1368); or the raids for lifting cattle, which were common from the Highlands of Scotland into the Lowlands at a much later period" (*Lias*). And he might have added, which visits were returned by the English into Scotland, with a like disregard of *meum* and *tuum*, when they could get a safe opportunity. This was but the fulfilment of prophecy upon Israel (Deut. xxviii. 31, 33, 43, 48).

When Israel had sown they came up, etc.] *i.e.*, They chose the time when the fruits of the earth were fast ripening, just before harvest (about March), and remained for weeks or months on the ground, till they had time to clutch the whole produce for the year; and when they had stripped it bare, they returned to their own country, leaving the poor Israelites to sow the land for a new crop in the following season, at which time they would return and repeat the work of rapine. Their route would be along the east bank of the Jordan, until they got as far as Bethshean (now Beisan), the principal ford of the river, when, crossing over, they would have before them to the north-east, the rich plain of Esdraelon and the fertile valley of Jezreel, forming together the very garden of Palestine, whose richness of soil was proverbial everywhere, and formed a most tempting prize to eyes accustomed to look on the sterility of the desert—luxuriant crops of corn, vineyards, olive trees, fig trees, pomegranates, milk and honey—all found in profuse abundance. Here they would revel until feasted to the full, when going along the course of the Kishon, and passing through the mountain gorges on the west, would then turn southward along the rich belt of land that skirted the sea, the southern part of which was occupied by the Philistines, their last city being Gaza. There the forces of the marauders necessarily took end, for there was nothing more in that direction to seize.*

4. They encamped against them]—ready to seize their plunder by force of arms, if they could not get it peaceably (Ps. xxvii. 3; 2 Sam. xii. 28). But such was the cowardice of the God-forsaken people, that they never once attempted to take the field against these insolent robbers, far less did they dream for a moment that they could be driven out of the country. The same course was taken by the Turks on a larger scale, when they first made their appearance in the east of Europe, and seized one territory after another, crushing all opposition. **The increase of the earth]**—the *annual produce of the soil*; such as wheat, barley and grass; wine, honey, milk and oil; all fruit trees' produce, and such things as are alluded to in the following passages (Ex. iii. 8; Deut. viii. 8; xxxii. 14; 2 Chron. ii. 10, 15; Ezek. xxvii. 17 and 19; Isa. vii. 22, 23; Micah iv. 4). **Till thou come to Gaza]**—an idiomatic phrase in the Hebrew language (Gen x 19; Jud. xi. 33; Gen. xiii. 10; 1 Sam. xvii. 52; xxvii. 8). **Left no sustenance for Israel, neither**

* It has long been the practice (till recently stopped) of the marauding Turkomans of Central Asia, to rob the long caravans of camels, laden with the produce of the countries of the Far East, passing to the countries of the Far West (and *vice versa*), along the route through ancient Media [Has that word any connection with *Midian?*] which has the Caspian Gates to the north and Persia to the South. These tribes also have long been in the habit of making "alamans," or raids on their weaker neighbours, their object being robbery and man-stealing, including woman and child-stealing. Their favourite hunting ground has been the eastern frontier of Persia. The people they caught were carried off to the inhospitable deserts of Central Asia, where escape was impossible. For prisoners of importance a heavy ransom was expected; the others were made to work in the fields, or were sold as chattels where a market could be found. These incursions were made sometimes up to the gates of Teheran, while so strangely imbecile or helpless were the governors of Persia, the country once ruled over by a Cyrus and an Ahasuerus, that little or no opposition was offered to the fierce barbarians who came plundering and murdering to within a few miles of the capital. No wonder that all the towns and villages are walled in with towers and gates which are shut at night. Even in many of the fields were towers, as refuges for the people at work, in case of sudden alarm, when there was no time to reach the village. The workers by squeezing themselves through a narrow opening in the bottom, which could be closed with a stone, might thus escape, and the Turkoman would lose his prize. To complete the picture, occasionally some of the governors on the frontier, who could have stopped their raids, allowed them to pass westwards in order to catch them on their return, laden with the spoil they had captured. This was profitable to the governor, who thus bagged everything. Happily Russia by her movement into Central Asia, during the eighth decade of this century, has laid a strong hand on this system, and it may now be said no longer to exist. That movement if it has had few other beneficial effects seems to be breaking up the fallow ground, in what has long been one of the wildest, and most intractable wastes, both of the moral and physical worlds.

sheep, etc.]—*no means of support*, whether the fruit of the soil, or the flocks and herds. Not only were the rich plains of Issachar devastated, but the uplands of Manasseh were not safe from the hands of these rapacious prowlers, as the case of Gideon illustrates. Their march was "like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food" (Prov. xxviii. 3). To drive off the cattle has been the practice of the Bedouins all along unto this day; and it is customary, in some parts of Western Asia, to make a compromise with the invaders, engaging to pay them a heavy tribute on condition that they shall be left unmolested. Even powerful communities do this to avoid perpetual warfare. Besides the tribute, the chiefs look for substantial presents, and these being received as gifts in one year are exacted the next year as a matter of right. Ere long the pressure becomes intolerable, and they are obliged to leave the settlements altogether.—(*Pict. Bible.*) *Not a solitary sheep, ox or ass* which came in their way was left to the Israelites! So complete was the pillage. Their cattle, comprising beeves, sheep, asses and camels, would eat up all the herbage and every green thing which they did not require for themselves. For they were most numerous (Num. xxxi. 32-39).

5. They came up, and their cattle and their tents, etc.]—*they and their cattle* is emphatic—*their tents*—those who lived in their tents. All their domestics, as well as fighting men. It was not a sudden assault followed by a hasty retreat; but they came to remain in the land, for a time at least, to fatten themselves on its rich produce. Came as grasshoppers.] Rather *locusts*—כַּ in *like abundance* to the locusts; also like to them in *voracity*, of which it is said in Joel ii. 3, "the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them is a desolate wilderness." It was a deluge of human robbers.*

6. Greatly impoverished.]—דַּל is a strong word, implying more than that they suffered a great loss, or had much taken from them. It implies that they felt *utterly desolate and helpless*. What a spectacle was before them! Their beautiful country turned into a vast and hideous wreck; countless marauders roaming at will all over the land, devouring or trampling down ruthlessly the choicest fruit of their matchless soil, until scarcely a stalk of grain or a blade of grass was left in Jezreel itself. As far as the eye could reach, the human wolves had done their work with absolute completeness. It was one vast sea of wreckage. On every foot of the sacred land was inscribed "Ichabod." The curse of heaven was everywhere marked. They were a people forsaken of their God. Hence they were thoroughly dispirited, and hung their heads in despair and shame, under the terrible conviction that on the one hand they had deserved it all, and on the other, that they were utterly powerless to effect a remedy for their condition.†

But this conviction was not arrived at all at once. For the first three years these depredators, Josephus tells us, repeated each year their terrible visit, with such disastrous result, that a large part of the land was no longer sown, while the miserable inhabitants, with their numbers thinned, partly through famine, and partly through oppression, at last, in great numbers quitted their homes and sought to the retreats and fastnesses among the mountains referred to in verse 2. For four years more did they survive the terrible humiliation of their country until they agreed by general consent to return to their allegiance to the God from whom they had apostatized (Hos. v. 15). Now they were virtually saying "come, let us return unto the Lord, for He hath torn and He will heal, He hath smitten and He will bind up."

7. They cried unto the Lord because of Midian.] (See p. 159). (chap. iii. 9, 15; iv. 3; Ps. cvi. 44, 45; Ps. cvii. 6, 19, 28).

8. The Lord sent a prophet.] A *man*, a prophet; not *an angel*. An unnamed messenger (1 Kings xiii. 1, 2; xx. 13, 35; 2 Kings ix. 1, 4). God would send a prophet before He sends a saviour. Before giving the blessing He first deals with that which keeps back the blessing. They were beginning to use the language of penitence; they must learn it more thoroughly. (Acts ii. 37., yet the apostle adds ver. 38—carry your repentance farther). The message itself etc., is like that of 1 Sam. x. 18, or Josh. xxiv. 17 and Jud. ii. 1.—I brought you up from Egypt, etc.] It was strange that they should so continually require to be reminded of one of the very first truths in their national history, the day which of all others had a white letter mark in their calendar. Then they for the first time rose up to be a nation. Then was laid the foundation of everlasting obligations to their God, to whom alone they owed their unparalleled history as a people.

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* From p. 38 under verse 5, they and their camels were without number]—rather, *dromedaries* (Isa. lx. 6) which are peculiar to the deserts of the South and East. Camels and asses take the place of horses and oxen in the West. Camels, indeed, were not unfrequently used for ploughing.

† Many think it was about this time that the great famine occurred in the land which led Elimelech and his family to remove to the land of Moab to sojourn there, and when Ruth through Naomi's instrumentality became a convert to the faith of Israel's God (Ruth i.)

10. But ye have not obeyed my voice.] These words contain the charge which their God brings against them. This short sentence would not be all that the prophet would say. It was rather the theme on which he would enlarge; in the same manner in which we have an account of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. That sermon may have occupied more than an hour in delivery, and yet as given in the canon, it is so abridged as not to occupy a tenth part of that time in the reading. The line of thought followed by the speaker alone is given; so here— **The gods of the Amorites.]**—This name is put for *the Canaanites*, (as in Josh. xxiv. 15, 18; and Gen. xv. 16). "In the Egyptian monuments of Ramases iii., Palestine is called the land of the Amori. The prophet may have been addressing the dwellers in the mountains where the Amorites (the Highlanders) dwelt. (Gen. xlviii. 22). The idolatries of that race were specially abominable (see 1 Kings xxi. 26; 2 Kings xxi. 11)." [*Speaker's Com.*] It has well been remarked that "the existence of a class of men, whose duty it is to convict men of moral declension, is peculiar to revealed religion. Other religions had their *priests*; Judaism and Christianity alone had their *prophets*." [*Lias*].

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 1–10.

God's Dealings with the Unteachable Human Heart.

Here again we have the same weary go-round. Fresh outbreaks of depravity; new chastisements of the Divine hand; the treacherous heart turning again to its God when it finds that it must; and God, with wonderful tenderness and slowness to anger (at every new stage becoming more wonderful), repenting Him of the evil and granting deliverance. We have—

I. The Picture of Sin Presented.

It is not a case of sinning for the first time, but a case of repeated sinning, and that accompanied with every possible aggravation.

1. The form of their sin was of a heinous character. Idol-worship was peculiarly offensive to their God. It was a direct rejection of Jehovah as their God, notwithstanding all His claims to be so acknowledged. No greater insult could be offered to His Majesty and His Holiness. It was to cast off His authority, to deny His sovereign rights, to refuse Him submission, to contemn His glorious perfections, to trample under foot His law, and to reject His Divine fellowship. It was to do all this in the most offensive manner, by preferring to worship in His place beasts and fourfooted things, or images of sinful objects, the work of their own hands. It was to go lower still—it was to set up the embodiments of sin in the place of God, and to give to these the devotion and the worship which are properly due to God. It was to give external form and embodiment to the worst ideals of wickedness which the human imagination could conceive, and yield up to these the homage which is due only to the Holy One of Israel! In this matter the "desperately-wicked heart" seems to have exceeded itself in its ordinary acting. And to complete the picture, it must take away the one foundation of all possible good (namely, the worship of the Good One), and to expose the heart to the incursion of all possible evils.

Idolatry, indeed, implies the creature striking out for itself in disregard of its Maker, as if its Maker were insufficient to it, and His presence were a burden rather than a pleasure. "Have I been a wilderness to Israel?—a land of darkness? Wherefore say, my people, We will come no more to thee? What iniquity have your fathers found in me that they are gone from Me and have walked after vanity?" This reproach applies to all who put any other objects in place of God, and give to these the homage, the affection, the interest and the obedience which are due to Him alone. It may be riches, or fame, social distinction, the good opinions of our fellows, or any prize which the man who lives without God counts dear (*see* pp. 110, 111, 123).

2. They sinned against the clearest light. All the means of instruction which that age could furnish in the matter of their duty to their God were employed to press His claims on their attention. If they had no printed Bible, yet at the Red Sea, at Mount Horeb, all through the wilderness, at Jordan, and in every city of the Canaanites, as well as in many startling events of more than 200 years afterwards—they had all the facts and revelations of the Divine character and of human duty which go to make a Bible. And they had these as living facts—events passing before their eyes, coming with the freshness of personal experience—in which they themselves were principal factors. They had an illuminated Bible given them to read, in which the blindest among them could see a great meaning. It was a Bible which spoke with a plainness that the dullest could appreciate, and with a loudness that made the most stolid fall down and worship. But they had no eyes to read such a Bible; no ears to hear its remarkable sayings, for "they did shut their eyes that they might not see, and stop their ears that they might not hear." They sinned against the clearest light as to the claims which Jehovah had on the allegiance and love of their hearts. "They would not come to the light lest their deeds should be reproved." Hence they continued as "sottish children—a people of no understanding" (see Deut. xxxii. 5, 6, 28; iv. 5-8, 32-36; Luke xii. 48; Matt. xi. 21-23; Num. xv. 30, 31; John ix. 41; Rom. ii. 12-16).

3. They sinned in abusing the highest privileges. They had the continual presence of God among them that they might enjoy His fellowship. A way of access was provided through the appointed sacrifices. The means whereby individual sins might be pardoned, and personal sanctification secured, were set every day before their eyes in the blood of sprinkling and the water of purification. God's own glorious character as a God of truth and righteousness, of holiness and love, was exhibited very strikingly in the statutes, ordinances, and commandments which were given them as a law for their conduct. They had exceeding great and precious promises made to them from time to time as to their deliverance for the present, and the realisation of bright hopes for the future. They had very endearing and very honourable names given them by their God, and they had continually fresh proofs given that He was among them on all occasions, ever ready to do them such signal service by the events of His Providence as no other people on earth ever experienced. Yet all this was despised and put aside when they "forsook the Lord their God and worshipped Baalim and the groves." This comes very near the case described in the terrible passage of Heb. vi. 4-6, or that other in Heb. x. 26-29, making allowance for the difference of the dispensations (Isa. v. 4; Matt. xxi. 35-39-43; Acts vii. 51-53; 2 Kings xvii. 12-18; John xii. 35-37; Luke xii.) (*See* pp. 120, 121).

4. They sinned in disregarding the most sacred obligations. Never were a people so sacredly bound by acts of kindness shown them, by great deliverances wrought, by honours conferred, and by hopes opened up. The whole Book of Deuteronomy is a record of the extent and the weight of the obligations laid on that people to love and serve Jehovah as their God "He hath not dealt so with any nation—the children of Israel are a people near unto Him." They were set forth as priests among the nations, to make "mention of the loving kindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord according to all that the Lord hath bestowed upon them, and the great goodness to the house of Israel, which He bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His loving kindnesses." And those who have set before them the rich discoveries contained in the pages of the New Testament truth; who find the Son of God standing before them in the capacity of the Son of

Man; who hear from His own lips the free offer of eternal life, in all its immeasurable fulness, to those who are willing to be reconciled to God through His precious blood; and who have many precious promises made to them both for the present and the future life—these have obligations laid on them to love and live for God, which no scales can weigh, and no mind can appreciate. (see Heb. i. 1–3; ii. 2, 3, 4; x. 19–23; Matt. xii. 41, 42; Ps. lxxxix. 15, 16; Prov. i. 20–23, with 24–28; John iii. 36, also 16–18; Rev. iii. 15–18).

5. They sinned in breaking the most solemn engagements. They not only had many acts of kindness shown them, and great things done for them, but they had entered into a special covenant with Jehovah, and pledged themselves to be His people. They were formally set apart by the sprinkling of blood to be His. God Himself came down on Mount Sinai to enter into this covenant, and the whole proceedings were conducted in so solemn a manner as to be memorable to all future generations. To break this covenant (which was made for all their generations) was to perjure themselves, and increase their guilt to an incalculable degree. To break one's solemn engagement made to a fellow man is reckoned a sin of deep dye, but how shall we characterise the violation of a solemn oath made to high Heaven? (see p. 121).

6. They sinned in the face of the most earnest teachings. Especially the teachings of Divine Providence. What did the fathers gain by serving other gods? Had not the experiment been made once and again, and on several occasions? Did not the history of two centuries and a half prove it to be a palpable folly, and a terrible evil to forsake the true and living God, the only fountain of living waters? Did not all the figures of Israel's history since they entered into Canaan, each one in his place, condemn with a fearful emphasis the crime of forsaking Jehovah? What a long tale of sorrow and degradation was the history of the generation that went before the present one, when they were so grievously oppressed by the cruel Jabin! Surely twenty years' pressure of that iron heel might have read a lesson sufficient to teach for a whole century the sin and danger of idolatry. And the mighty acts of Israel's God, when He rose up from His place to take vengeance on the oppressors of His people, in the discomfiture and ruin of Sisera and his army, might have taught for generations to come that there was no god but Jehovah. Yet though having these and many other lessons of instruction and warning set before them, this generation fell again into the mire from which their fathers had at such cost been drawn. (*See* pp. 121, 122).

One general remark we must not omit to make as regards this melancholy picture of sin, that when men complain of the awful character of the *punishment* which God sometimes brings down even on His own professed people, the wonder ought to cease when we look candidly at the terrible character of their *guilt*. God is just when He smites, as well as when He smiles.

II. The state of heart which this picture indicates.

1. Its inveterate tendency to sin. The propensity must be strong to make its appearance in the face of such solemn remonstrances, and such weighty arguments as God employs to make men desist from it. Sin has a deep root in the heart. "The leprosy is deeper than the skin," "the scall spreads in the skin"—"it is a fretting leprosy." "In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." (Lev. xiii. 3, 36; Rom. vii. 18). Facts prove, account for it as we may, that the spirit or tendency of backsliding is incorrigible among God's people. Indeed, in face of the facts that meet us on every page of this book, who can doubt the truth of God's own testimony—"*the carnal mind is enmity*

against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Rom. viii. 7)." (Jer. xiii. 23; ii. 22; Matt. xix. 24; John iii. 3, 6, 7; Rom. vii. 23, 24; viii. 8; Eph. ii. 1; Ps. li. 5).

2. The hardness of the heart. This is the feature of character which shows itself in refusing to be impressed by any dealing which God may have with the heart. This was strikingly visible in Pharaoh's case (Ex. vii.–xi.). (Heb. iii. 8, 15; iv. 7; Josh. xi. 20; 1 Sam. vi. 6; Jer. vii. 26). It implies that the heart offers resistance to the motive by which God would impress it. It is not only callous—impassive, or utterly indifferent. It is actively opposing the influence by which God seeks to move it. But it includes the want of sensibility.

3. Its boldness in sin. There is a recklessness of consequences; a defiance, wild it may be, yet still a defiance of the Lawgiver, and a refusal to submit to His authority.

4 Its obstinacy in sin. The heart shows a pertinacity in clinging to its sins. It refuses to obey God's voice (Neh. ix. 17; Ps. lxxviii. 10). It refuses to repent (Jer. v. 3; viii. 5). It refuses to receive any proper knowledge of God and His ways (Jer. ix. 6; xiii. 10). The stubbornness of the heart in refusing to receive any teaching from God's judgments is strikingly brought out by the prophet Amos in chap. iv., verses 6, 8, 9, 10, 11; Jer. v. 23.

5. Its depth of enmity against God. It is said to be "desperately wicked," which implies wickedness in an unusual degree (Jer. xvii. 9). If the human heart does not constitutionally consist of enmity against God, it is magnetised with that enmity, and said to be alienated from God (Col. i. 21; Eph. iv. 18; John vii. 7; xv. 23, 24; 1 John ii. 15, 16.

6. Its unteachableness. Notwithstanding all God's dealing with the heart in this case, and for so long a time there was no reformation. Patience and long forbearance on the one side, to show how reluctant He was to chastise them; severe scourging employed when milder treatment had no effect, to show that God would keep to His word of threatening as well as His word of promise when necessary. Yet the old tendency shows itself so soon as the pressure of trouble is removed.

Forty years had elapsed during which the land had peace, with the invaluable privilege of a Deborah and a Barak at the helm of affairs. But long before that time was expired, the mass of the people had again begun to forsake Jehovah, and to follow after the worship of idols. No sooner are these zealous defenders of righteousness in their graves than the stream of evil, which had been stemmed for a time, flows on as before. Israel was but an example of the general rule. Even the awful catastrophe of the destruction of a world by a universal flood did not suffice to take away men's depravity, root and branch. After the flood as before, the account still is, "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." (See Gen. vi. 5, with viii. 21.) In the days of David the account was similar (Ps. xiv. 3). In Solomon's time the same (Prov. xxvii. 22). In the days of Isaiah matters seem worse rather than better (Isa. i. 5, 6). In Jeremiah's age the report is as dark as ever (Jer. xvii. 9). After all the plagues, Pharaoh's heart continued as hard as the nether mill-stone. The Sodomites and Canaanites though forewarned of the issue of their high-handed sins would not hearken, and so were destroyed. And these Israelites, after their settlement in the land promised to the fathers, though dealt with in the most solemn manner to lead them to give up their idolatrous practices, yet clung to them with extreme obstinacy during all the period of the Judges, and also the long reign of the kings, for nearly a thousand years, until the nation was ground to the very dust by the heavy calamities which such apostacy from the God of Israel at last brought on

their heads. "My people are bent to back-sliding from Me." They are "slidden back with a perpetual back-sliding" (Jer. viii. 5; Hos. xi. 7, iv. 16, 17; Jer. ii. 32, also 10, 11, vii. 28). (See pp. 166, 186, 190.)

XXI. God cannot in any case tolerate sin.

As often as it is repeated, His anger must come down upon it. It might be said, it was already conclusively proved, that sin was so inwoven into the very nature of this people, that it was hopeless to get it extirpated; for so long as the stubborn propensity of their hearts to apostatise continued, there must be a continually fresh outbreak of sin, when these hearts were left to themselves. That might be a good argument for casting off such a people altogether, when it was fully proved, that they were incorrigibly treacherous to the covenant of their God, but it is no reason, why God should be forgetful of what is due to His own holy name. He cannot connive at sin, and be true to Himself. That He sometimes may *seem* to "wink" at sin has been inferred from such a passage as Acts xvii. 30. But it is one thing to "pass over" sin for a time—not to take it up, and give judgment upon it, until a fit period come round, and quite another thing, expressly to tolerate it, while dealing with it in the exercise of His Providential rule. While men sin, God's anger ever burns against it, even though He should long suffer it to go on, and remain silent. Wisdom must come in to decide as to the proper *manner*, and the proper *time*, for showing His anger.

In the present case, *this long forbearance with a people so wedded to sin*, and the purpose not to cast them entirely off under any circumstances, strongly fits in with Messianic arrangements. The utter depravity of their nature shows the great need of adopting some method out of ordinary course, to cure men's hearts of their tendency to depart from God. This is what the gospel specially provides (p. 191). Meantime proof must be given that no toleration is allowed to sin, that though ordinary punishment does not suffice to effect a cure (Isa. i. 5, 6), yet evidence must be given that sin is a thing which must be frowned upon under all circumstances. If the heart is ever turning aside like the deceitful bow, then it must ever be chastised anew (p. 170). For,

1. **God's nature is irreconcilably opposed to sin.** Ps. v. 4-6. He not only hates sin, but He "cannot look upon it" (Hab. i. 13). He cannot let His eye rest upon it for a moment. As light cannot co-exist in the same apartment with darkness, so God cannot dwell in the same heart with sin. He is separated from it not only by distance, but by a strong antagonism of nature (2 Cor. vi. 14, 15). All His perfections are against it. He is so *holy*, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The very "heavens are not clean in His sight." He is so *just and righteous* that it is proverbial to say "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Ps. xi. 7; xcvii. 2). He is so *true*, that "heaven and earth may pass away, but His words shall not pass away" (Num. xxiii. 19; 1 Sam. xv. 29). "His Yea is Yea, and His Nay is Nay") Rev. iii. 14). He is so *unchangeable* in the principles of His government, that He is said to be "without variableness or the shadow of turning" (Mal. iii. 6; Job xxiii. 13).

It is the greatest mystery of the universe that sin should ever have been allowed to enter it at all under the government of so holy a God; and the next greatest mystery is, that it should have been allowed to continue so long. For God is ever irreconcilably opposed to sin. On the other hand, neither can a nature under the dominion of sin ever be reconciled to holiness. How often are we told that, under all the chastisement which God sent upon this people, they refused to return to him. This whole book is the historical proof (Jer. v. 3; ix. 3; 2 Chron. xxviii. 22; Rev. xvi. 9-11). It is invariable as the law by which water runs down a hill.

2. Sin carries its own punishment in its own bosom. The simple fact that sin means enmity to God involves a terrible penalty. God's favour is lost, and the life of the creature becomes one of misery. How can a man bear to be at war with God? He has the whole universe against him. Sin is a debt he never can pay; a burden under which he must groan for ever; a leprosy for which in all nature there is no cure; a poison for which neither man nor angel can find an antidote; a serpent that shall without pity sting its victim for ever. There is no peace to the man who clings to his sin. It is a perpetual disturber. There is no rest in sin. It is an unresting trouble. "Many sorrows are to the wicked." So many miseries accompany sin that all the pleasure it gives is but as a drop of honey in a sea of gall (*South*). Sin and punishment go together as substance and shadow. They grow together out of one stem. Punishment is a fruit that ripens within the flower of the pleasure that conceals it (*Emerson*). "The genius of a heathen has taught a striking moral on this subject. He made the model of a serpent, and fixed it in the bottom of a goblet, coiled for the spring, a pair of gleaming eyes in its head, and in its open mouth fangs raised to strike. It lay beneath the ruby wine. Nor did he who raised the golden cup to quench his thirst, and quaff the delicious draught, suspect what lay below till, as he reached the dregs, that dreadful head rose up and glistened before his eyes. So when life's cup is nearly emptied, and sin's last pleasure quaffed, and unwilling lips are draining the bitter dregs, shall rise the ghastly terrors of remorse, death and judgment on the despairing soul (*Guthrie*).

3 God's word uniformly condemns it. God's word is His written law—a compendium of the judgments He passes on men's principles and actions. On every page sin in every form is condemned. The first act of disobedience, it threatens with death; the same tone is kept up throughout, and its closing statement shows the same unalterable attitude towards sin,—"let him that is unjust remain unjust still," etc. In unequivocal language it declares that "the wages of sin is death," that "God is angry with the wicked every day, and if he do not turn, He will whet His sword, and bend His bow," etc. (Rom. vi. 23; Ps. vii. 11, 12). He will "set His face against" the wicked (Ps. xxxiv. 16; Lev. xxvi. 17; xvii. 10; xx. 3, 5, 6, etc.) and in the day when He visits those who sin, He will visit their sin upon them (Ex. xxxii. 34). "He will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. xxxiv. 7). Their sin "shall surely find them out" (Num. xxxii. 23). Indeed all the threatenings of the Bible are a manifold condemnation of sin (Deut. xxviii. 45; Eph. v. 6).

4. His Providence always works against it. He may not indeed visit the sinner with instant destruction. Men may be permitted to go on in sin for a time, while the thunders of justice sleep, yet sin does not pass unpunished. Where there is no repentance, sooner or later, He brings down the rod of chastisement, or the sword of destruction. At the proper time, "He will lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet." It is an old but true proverb, "the mills of the gods grind slow, but they grind to powder." God came not to Adam till the evening, but He came. Though the deluge was delayed for 120 years, yet at the appointed time it came. God waited on the Canaanites for their repentance for 430 years, but as they continued impenitent, the sword of Joshua was commanded to do its work. Joseph's brethren thought their wicked deed was forgotten, as year after year slipped away, and no whisper was ever made of it. But when the dungeons of Egypt closed around them, and they received unaccountably rough dealing from the strange man who was lord of the country, an accusing voice was awakened within them, memory called up the past, and the old sin rose up as a spectre before them in all its terribleness, as the cause of their accumulated troubles. Silently had that sin

dogged their steps, while they slept and awoke from day to day, and much of life passed on. It lay forgotten, but not dead. At the fit moment God held it up before them, and they cried out with one voice, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul," etc.

"*Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet I know it shall be well only with them that fear the Lord,*" etc. "These things thou hast done, and I kept silence." The silence is ominous. "A dead silence goes before the earthquake. Nature seems hushed into an awful stillness, more dreadful than the storm would be. It is as if she were holding her breath at the thought of the coming disaster. The air hangs heavy; not a breath fans the leaves; the birds cease their music; the hum of the insects ceases; there is no ripple in the streams; and meanwhile houses, it may be cities, are on the brink of ruin. So it is with God's silence over the wicked. It will be followed by the earthquake of His judgments. "When they shall say Peace and Safety, then sudden destruction," etc.—(*Goulburn*).

5. The laws of a man's own nature cry out against it. Sin is a kind of boomerang which goes off into space curiously, but turns again on its thrower, and with tenfold force strikes the hand, or the person that launched it, after describing singular curves. There is no such terrible punishment known on earth as an accusing conscience. It is like "Tophet of old," "the pile of which is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone doth kindle it." Wilful and aggravated sin is the fuel of that awful fire. Examples we have in Belshazzar, Cain, Herod, Pilate, Judas, and others. They prove that punishment is the recoil of sin, and that the strength of the backstroke is in proportion to the force of the original blow. Conscience is a clock that strikes loud and gives warning, in one man's case; in another the hand points silently to the number but *strikes* not. Meantime the hours pass away, death hastens, and after death comes the judgment.

6. The cross of Christ shows that sin cannot, under any possible circumstances, go unpunished. This is incomparably the highest proof that can be given in the case. The Eternal Father spares not His only begotten Son, because He cannot spare sin! What depth of hatred to sin is here? How supreme the necessity for inflicting death, as the due desert of our sins when such a substitute as this cannot be exempted from bearing the full burden of Divine wrath! The sufferings of mere creatures are small indeed, and of very ordinary consequence, compared with the groans and agonies of Him who made the worlds, and who wrought all the mighty works of Divine power, which distinguished His life in this world. The whole human race are but as a grain of dust before the infinite Majesty of the Son of God, who yet called Himself "the Son of Man." Yet "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him," because He became responsible for our sins, and was "made a curse for us."

Our conclusion is, that if God could not spare our sins, but was so strict to mark iniquity, we too must resolve unalterably, in the strength of God's grace, not to spare them ourselves. We must wage ceaseless war against them, in all the Proteian forms they may assume, saying, Thou shalt die—and thou—and thou! The whole brood must be cast out; while holy thoughts, devout affections, and heavenly longings must take their place. Let our motto be *Delenda sunt peccata.*

IV. Repeated sin brings heavier chastisement.

God warned His people, that if they would not listen to His first reproofs, but would obstinately repeat their offences afresh, He would not only chastise them again, but would "chastise them seven times more for their sins." (Lev. xxvi.

18, 21, 24, 28). He begins with whips, but by and bye proceeds to the use of scorpions. This was strikingly exemplified in the Midianitish invasion—the most overwhelming of all the judgments God had yet brought upon the land. As *Bp. Hall* remarks, "During the former tyranny, Deborah was permitted to judge Israel under a palm tree; under this, private habitations are not allowed. Then the seal of judgment was in the sight of the sun; now their very dwellings must be secret under the earth. They who had rejected the protection of God, now run to the mountains for shelter; and as they had savagely abused themselves, so they are fain to creep into the dens and caves of the rocks like the wild animals, for safeguard. God had sown spiritual seed among them, and they suffered their heathen neighbours to pull it up by the roots; and now no sooner can they sow their material seed, than Midianites seek to devour it."

"*Jabin mightily oppressed them for twenty years;*" but now the distress occasioned by the Midianites was only for seven years. Was not that an alleviation rather than an aggravation? Only in appearance, for it is possible to suffer more in one year than in twenty. It depends on the treatment given; and it is generally admitted that this was the greatest scourge they ever had in the days of the Judges. What a frightful calamity to be robbed of the whole harvest produce of their fertile country, year by year, till seven years had passed over them! only a few scanty gleanings being left here and there in corners, or bleak spots, as sustenance for their vast population. All the miseries of famine were upon them. And the life they otherwise led was like that of brute beasts, that find their lairs by burrowing in the ground! To what a low ebb does sin reduce its votaries! (comp. p. 170).

V. The cowardice and weakness of guilt.

Henry says, "Sin dispirits men, and makes them sneak into dens and caves. The day will come, when chief captains and mighty men will call in vain to rocks and mountains to hide them."

1. **Their former condition.** Here was a people who traversed the ground of the wilderness for forty years, during the greater part of which they were crossing and re-crossing part of the territory occupied by these marauders, and yet only once in all that period did these tribes dare to encounter them in the open field, and that not alone but in conjunction with Moab. (Num. xxii. 4, 7). Again, when God sent twelve thousand Israelites to punish the Midianites for their sin, in having tempted Israel to sin, they trode them down with ease like the grass of the field, and Midian was by a single blow reduced to the point of ruin. Still, further as we go down the history, beyond the date referred to in the chapter, to the days of Saul, king of Israel, we are told that the transjordanic tribes (Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh) alone made war on the whole people of the Hagarenes, or Ishmaelites, or Midianites, and inflicted on them a signal defeat. They had long been harassed by raids made by these freebooters into their country, and they resolved, after asking counsel of their God, to take the strong step of rooting them entirely out of that part of the country, and colonising the whole region, as far as the Euphrates, themselves. This scheme was most successfully accomplished (see 1 Chron. v. 9, 10, also verses 18–22; comp. 1 Chron. i. 31, and Gen. xxv. 15, 16).

2. **Their present condition.** But now Israel, being deserted by their God, had become so cowardly and weak, that all their tribes united dare not meet this outlandish and despicable people in the open field. They see "an undisciplined mob" come up in the most arrogant manner, and squat themselves down at pleasure amid the very fat of their land, and take all of the best they

can find, while they, the degenerate descendants of a once conquering nation, not venturing once to meet them in the open country, are only too glad to skulk into corners, and make themselves cavities under ground for habitations! And the whole country is left at the mercy of the enemy! Not fifty years had yet elapsed, since, on this very plain of Jezreel, Sisera's mighty army had been scattered as the chaff. Now the children of those who fought under Barak have become timid, terror-stricken fugitives. "These crouching slaves that timidly peep from behind the projecting rocks, or shiver in the damp darkness of the caverns, are they indeed the sons of the men who vanquished the hosts of Sihon and of Og, in whose sight the sun and moon stood still, and great hailstones were rolled down from heaven on the heads of their enemies? Where are now the old traditions of victory? Where is now the shout of a king in their camp? Whence has gone the national character—the energy of this once invincible race?"

3. Sin brings down. Sin degrades (p. 104). It terribly weakens (p. 107, 265, 266). The basis of all true courage of the highest type is a good conscience, which a man can only find in the ways of righteousness. But where there is conscious guilt, the foundations of all real strength are sapped. "The wicked flee even when none pursue." God speaks to a man's imagination, and it becomes to him the bearer of fearful tidings, wherever he turns. "He fears each bush an officer." It is the same now as then. There is no mere chance in the matter. The evil comes expressly from the Lord. "He scares him with dreams, and terrifies him through visions; terrors make him afraid on every side." Why is a man who has all the conditions of prosperity in his life yet a stranger to happiness, destitute of hope, and a prey to groundless fears? It is because he allows himself to be enslaved by sin, because he allows sinful thoughts to swarm and settle on his heart, and eat up all its strength; or because he is so craven in spirit as not to resist the approaches of evil, but gives way to all manner of temptation with which the wicked one, or the wicked world may surround him. O what need for Divine keeping for such hearts, in such a world, and exposed to such an enemy! "Ye are kept by the power of God" (1 Pet. i. 5). "Those whom thou gavest me I have kept," etc. (John xvii. 12). What need have the best of men to get themselves purged from the idols of the heart!

VI. All relief at God's hand begins with earnest prayer.—Ver. 7. (see pp. 198–200, 202, 224, 225).

We do not say that God never confers a blessing except in answer to prayer. He may sometimes see reason to bestow some spiritual good even where prayer has not been offered up. He gives indeed, "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," in one sense. For we generally have a poor conception of the value of the blessings we pray for; but when He gives them, He puts far more meaning into them than we do. He also sometimes confers blessings which we do not ask at all, according as He sees it to be necessary or fit, just as the kind and watchful parent would give to the child what was needful, though not asked. But the main idea is, that we have no just ground to expect deliverance from trouble, or any other blessing from God till we have prayed for it. The direction given to us is, "*ask, and ye shall receive;*" "ye have not, because ye ask not." Our warrant for expecting blessings to be given in answer to prayer is (1.) such, is *the rule* laid down in God's word. (2.) Prayer itself is *in many ways glorifying to God.* (3.) True prayer implies *a spirit of penitence*, without which the way is blocked against all blessing from the Divine hand. Israel's cry seemed to be earnest and deep —"out of the depths." God hears the prayer of the destitute, when penitent. (Ps. xxxiv. 4–6, 17; cii. 17, 18). (See p. 173).

VII.—God's first answer is a call to thorough penitence.

1. **He explains the meaning of His Providential dealing.** In sending His prophet to the people, He leaves them in no doubt as to the meaning of this disastrous Providence. Disastrous it was, and very grievous, yet not mysterious. It was only what they had every reason to expect from what they had been told all along. If no calamity had befallen them, then they might have wondered; but, as it was, the natural expectation had been realised. These events did not happen by chance. They were specially sent by God to intimate His high displeasure with their sins. God had really gone against them, because they had abandoned His worship and dishonoured His name.

2. **He specially reproves them for ingratitude and breach of vows.** According to the excellence of the spirit of gratitude is the detestable character of ingratitude (pp. 259, 260, 263, with p. 122). No people had had the one-half done for them that Israel had, and more was justly expected of them than of others. Yet they had turned their backs on the kindest of Benefactors, and had wickedly put out of memory the sacred doings of His mighty hand. Their conduct was extremely offensive in daring to treat so slightingly His gracious deliverances of the past. And it was terribly intensified by their doing all this after solemnly engaging to belong to Jehovah and to serve Him from the land of Egypt. And they not only broke their covenant, but most wickedly went into the service of Amoritish idolatry, though so repeatedly warned against those heinous sins.

3. **He insists on penitence before deliverance is granted.** Far more stress is laid on penitence than on the means of deliverance. The latter was easy to be found if only the former were thoroughly gone through. Hence the prophet, with his reproof, comes before the angel, with his deliverance. The great difficulty was to find penitence among the people. God's claims are set forth, and the people's backslidings emphasised, that they may be duly repented of, and a speedy and general return to the God of their fathers might be made. Penitence was the first step in the process. That taken, all the rest will come right, as happened with their father Jacob when he wrestled with the angel and prevailed, and the conquest of Esau and flight of all his troubles followed. God could, indeed, have struck down the Midianites at one blow, and so saved all the tantalising and harrowing suspense of the circuitous course which He actually did take. But though none had such true sympathy with the deeply afflicted Church as He had, His love was far-seeing and wise. Therefore He delayed for a time until the most useful lessons, which the rod alone can effectually teach, were learned by His erring children. It was only under great sufferings, and by painful experience of the sad fruits of sin, that they could learn effectually true sorrow for sin, self-abasement, submission, faith, patience and entire consecration to God. To get the backsliding people to practise the passive virtues of the religious character, was a valuable purpose to be gained, but if the deliverance had been accomplished in a day, there would have been no opportunity afforded for gaining it.

This seems to be the Divine rule under all circumstances, to send first a "ministry of condemnation," to produce conviction of sin, self-humiliation, and the casting away of transgressions; and when this has had its proper effect, then comes deliverance. Meantime the terrible character of the sin might be read in the terrible character of the punishment. In this case the prophet would likely travel from city to city, or to those places where he might find an audience, or any considerable number of people assembled all over the land. "It is a good sign when God chides us; His severe reproofs are ever gracious forerunners of mercy; whereas His silent connivance at the wicked argues deep and secret displeasure. The prophet made way for the angel, reproof for deliverance, humiliation for comfort."—(*Hall*).

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 1-10.

I. Besetting Sins.

1. Every age has its own besetting sins.

The besetting sin of the ancient Israel undoubtedly was that of *idol worship*. The depraved heart, being in a state of alienation from God, does not like to retain God in its knowledge. But in departing from Him it cannot remain in a state of neutrality. For there is no such thing possible as a negation of good. The feeling that could reject God is itself a positive evil. Hence, in leaving God, it comes under the dominion of sin. Besides, being made for God, all its deepest instincts cry out for something to take His place. A god of some kind it must have, and hence it devises a god after its own liking. Thus *from within* do we account for idolatry; and not less powerful was the influence operating *from without*. The universal example of the other nations was always acting with the force of a mighty current in the same direction. It was like the confluence of several mighty streams bearing down with great force.

Idolatry continued as the sin to which the Israelites were most addicted for centuries. It seemed bred in the bone. Not till the frightful calamity of the captivity had befallen them when the nation came near the point of being annihilated, were they cured of it. Even then depravity was not extirpated but assumed a new form. From that time the besetting sin was *Pharisaism*, consisting of pride in religious profession, systematic hypocrisy in attending to externals, and cold formalism in the discharge of religious duty. In the earlier centuries the age was very much distinguished by the tyrannical and cruel *oppression of the weak by the strong*. In what is called "the Dark Ages" the characteristic feature was the *torpor of spiritual slavery*; and when the human mind began to shake itself free, the principal feature of the times was that of *persecution for non-comformity of religious belief*. In the seventeenth century, the pendulum swung from a rigid austerity of profession and life, to the extreme of laxity in manners and even to *open profligacy and vice*. In the eighteenth century the prevailing spirit was that of *Deistical infidelity* on the one hand, along with *daring ridicule of Bible Christianity*, and on the other *nominal religious profession*, and *empty formality of worship*.

And now in the nineteenth century, the most strikingly many-sided age in the history of the world, we have not one besetting sin, but many. There is *avarice* or the *lust for money*, in the commercial world, carrying many breaches of the eighth and ninth commandments in its track, the *lust for power* in the political world, especially as between nations; the lust for *self-indulgence* in many forms, though visibly curbed by the awakened power of Christianity; the spirit of *liberty* becoming a rage, and running into *licence*; the spirit of *infidelity* assuming Protean forms, and appearing sometimes as *scepticism*, or mere questioning of Christian truths, sometimes, though seldom, as *Pyrrhonism*, or absolute doubt; again as *Spinozism*, or *Pantheism*; again as *Agnosticism*; *Atheism* proper; *Positivism* and *Naturalism*; *Spiritualism*; and *Rationalism*.

2. Every individual man has his besetting sins.

Wherever the enemy enters, his desire is to have a fortress of evil in the heart, one or more, so that if other parts should come under the influence of good, he might still hold out in that fortress, and possibly from thence reconquer the whole. A besetting sin, or one to which the man is specially addicted, is such a fortress. Or, it might be regarded as that side of the defences of the heart, where some lurk-

ing traitor has got command of the keys, and at an opportune moment, he opens the gates to the enemy.

Trench describes it as "that sin which gets advantage over us more easily than others, to which we have a mournful proclivity, an especial predisposition; it may be through natural temperament, through faults in our education, or the circumstances in which we are placed, or ... may be through our having given way to them in time past, and so broken down on that side the moral defences of the soul. The soul in such a case resembles paper, which, where it has been blotted once, however careful the erasure may have been, there do blots more easily run anew. A man should watch and pray against all sin, but he must set a double watch, and 'pray with all prayer' against an easily besetting sin."

3. It is through easily-besetting sins that Satan gains most of his victories.

In the case of such a sin, there is usually some charm, or hallucinating influence exercised over the soul by which it is more easily persuaded to listen to the tempter. A man's will as it were acts under the influence of an intoxication. He is allured into a kind of spiritual debauch. Though our first parents might be said to have a perfect panoply of defence, being entirely innocent, and without any seed of sin in their natures, yet their crafty adversary made the most dexterous use of the less strongly fortified points of the case. He attacked the weaker vessel first, he presented to the eye nothing gross or impure, but what appeared noble and most fit for a pure mind to attain, as the highest possible reach of knowledge, and especially he tried to over-reach an inferior nature with his superior intellect. It was practically assaulting our innocent humanity on its weak side. It has been so all along. He looks for the weak part of the embankment, where the great flood of waters is most ready to burst forth, and he tries to make a breach there.

Every man has a handle. This Satan soon finds out, and deftly uses to serve his own ends. He tempted *Judas* on the side of his covetousness, and in the same manner *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, *Demas*, *Lot's wife*, *Lot* himself also, though he was saved yet so as by fire. He tempted the *Jews* on the side of their expecting a Messiah of great temporal glory; *Pilate* on the side of his fear lest he should be reported to Cæsar as allowing a rival to the throne of Judea to escape; *Joseph's brethren* on the side of their fear lest the dreams of their envied younger brother should one day be realised; and *guilty Herod the great* on the side of his troubled conscience, that God would one day make use of the young child to wrest his kingdom from him because of his sins.

It is, indeed, almost always those points of a man's character, where he is specially liable to fall into some sin, that Satan attacks. Hence Christians are directed to "watch and pray lest," etc., and to "take the whole armour of God that they may be able to stand in the evil day," *i.e.*, the day of temptation. (See also 1 Peter v. 8; Eph. v. 15; Rom. xiii. 12–14; 1 Thess. v. 8; 1 Cor. xvi. 13; Heb. iii. 12.) "Indeed Satan baits his hook according to the appetite of the fish."—*Adams*. (pp. 168, 191.)

II. The Sins of the People of God.

1. A man may sin and yet be a child of God.

This is only too easily proved. For "there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not." All the good people of whom we have any account given in Scripture, have, every one of them, some spot or stain pointed out in his character. And there is scarcely one who makes reference to his state before God, but laments his sinfulness and pollution

(Ps. li.; Isa. vi. 5; Job xl. 4, xlii. 5, 6; Ezra ix. 6; Dan. ix. 5, 7; Matt. xxvi. 31–35; 1 John i. 8, 10). A good man in this world is really a bad man in the process of being made good. His heart resembles a muddy well, which has got a spring of clear, running water opened in the bottom of it. The purifying process is begun, but there is still much of the muddy element in the well, which requires time to clear it away. The process of sanctification is gradual. The "motions of sins which are by the law still work," though they are languishing and destined to die. There is "the old man with his deeds." But the fact that it is called "the old man" assumes that it is destined to die out. See the struggle described in Rom. vii. 15–25,

2. The sins of the good are specially heinous.

Sin, in place of coming nearer the point of toleration, when committed by a godly man, is only the more aggravated and offensive to God. The sins of these Israelites implied much greater guilt, than the same sins as committed by the heathen. There were many circumstances of aggravation. They were committed under much clearer light; they enjoyed privileges which the Canaanites never had; far more tender, more loving, and more sacred considerations did God use in dealing with their hearts than ever He did with the native idolaters of the land. Besides, they violated sacred vows, most solemnly entered into, and they forgot the most extraordinary acts of loving kindness ever done to any people in the history of time. The sacred position occupied by the people of God adds incalculably to the evil of their sins. Just as a sin committed in the Holy of Holies involves far greater guilt than a sin committed in one's private dwelling. There theft, which is bad in itself, becomes sacrilege.

If the sins of God's people are, notwithstanding this, freely forgiven when repented of, it is not because they are not exceedingly heinous, but because of two things:—1. They have already accepted Christ as their sin-bearer, while He has engaged to be their Advocate; and 2. They have got "the heart of flesh," and are ready to confess and forsake their sins.

3. These sins are specially dishonouring to God.

Because they represent God before the world. They are His children, and the Father's likeness is expected to be seen in the child. Though sin in all cases is detestable, yet it is not so surprising to be seen in the wicked. We expect to see more or less of it there. But, when it comes glaringly out in the case of a child of God, we say it is scandalous, and "gives occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." If the sun is eclipsed but one day it is more talked of than if it were to shine clearly for a whole year.

"It is terrible when a Christian becomes an argument against Christianity. To induce anyone to sin is for Satan a conquest, but in the case of a Christian it is a triumph."—(*South*). God specially hates sin in His own people. It is in gardens that weeds are most noxious, for their appearance there shows that, after all the pains taken, the work is still marred. "When the Lord saw it, He abhorred them because of the provoking of His own sons and daughters." (Deut. xxxii. 19).

4. Such sins are soon forsaken.

In the case of a wicked man, to sin is only in keeping with his nature. He acts in character. In the case of a child of God, it is quite the reverse. The wicked one for the moment has got an advantage over him, but he will speedily recover, as in the case of Peter (Luke xxii. 31, etc.).

"Whosoever is born of God sinneth not. . . and he cannot sin because he is born of God" (1 John iii. 9). "He that committeth sin is of the devil," *i.e.*, one whose nature it is so to do. It is not the nature of a man who is born of God to commit sin. The Spirit of God within him prompts him otherwise and he is now "led by that Spirit." When he does sin, through the uprising

of his native depravity, his better nature rebels against it, and he can give as the explanation, "it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom vii. 17). But still he mourns at the victory of sin over him, "O wretched man that I am," etc. (Rom. vii. 24). A good watch may point wrong for a season, but if the owner has paid a heavy price for it, he will see to its being repaired without delay, when it will get into its natural position and point right as before.

III.—The Worthlessness of Human Character before God.

1. From this narrative, and, indeed, from the whole book of Judges, we learn with what a fatal facility the human heart can forget all its mercies, its sad experiences, its gracious deliverances, and all the tender dealings of its God (pp. 95-101)! How strange that God should accept of such a people, as those whose character is here depicted, to represent Him in the world, to be called by His name, and to hold up His standard before men on the earth! Most strikingly is the idea brought out, of the utter worthlessness of human character before God. The character of Israel in every age was a continual blot. The descendants of those holy men with whom God entered into covenant — Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — in almost every generation, turned completely round from the attitude of allegiance which the fathers occupied, when God chose them and their seed to be a people to Him on the earth.

2. What a harrowing spectacle to the spiritual eye! As we turn over every page, it is to find some sickening tale of disobedience, treachery, apostasy, and everything that is bad—the very worst. We can hardly read a single paragraph without hanging our heads for very shame, to think that this is the people who are taken as a fair representation of the race to which we belong, and, that, as they were, so we are all judged to be in the roots of character, however different may be the soil in which we are planted, and however more genial the spiritual climate around us is. What a blackening of our human nature is here! Who "does not blush and hang his head to think himself a man?" The simple truth, without a stroke of emphasis, is a melancholy picture, fit only to be framed in black. It is an indelible disgrace to a creature made after the image of God. We dare only say, with trembling acquiescence in the Divine verdict, "Ichabod! Ichabod! The crown is fallen from our heads; woe unto us for we have sinned! We smite on our breasts and cry, God be merciful to us sinners!"

3. What a wonder of grace that God should not at once cast us off! The natural expectation is, that He would banish us from His presence, and consign us to endless darkness, raising up in our place, as He could do in a single moment, another race, all pure and spotless, of nobler rank, of more gifted capacity, and more faithful in their allegiance to the Eternal Throne. That could be done by a single word. But ere the old sinning race could be restored, the Son of God must die! The Eternal Light must be shrouded in darkness, and the Eternal Life must sink in death. How stedfast has the Divine love been to its first idea in the covenant made with Abraham! Man's faithlessness, and God's truthfulness appear in striking contrast.

4. The humiliating glimpse we here have of the falsity of human character in all ages.

This record is given intentionally as a specimen of human hearts in every age. What crowds came around Jesus, and yet all melted away before a single spiritual discourse (John vi.)! How quickly did the warmest friends of the Saviour show treachery when exposed

to temptation (Matt. xxvi. 56)! How superficial all the professions of friendship made to the aged apostle when he was in real difficulty (2 Tim. i. 15, 16)! What *perjury* has been committed by those who have solemnly engaged themselves to be the Lord's people—these *Israelites* in almost every age, with good words, but perfidious hearts, all *apostates*, all *lukewarm* professors, all *unworthy partakers* of the Lord's supper, all inconsistent Christians. These are camp followers only.

IV. The Unseen Dangers from which God Delivers His People.

"*He is the Preserver (not Saviour) of all men, especially of them who believe.*" Believers have a special promise of protection from danger. "*He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers, nor sleeps.*" Of His vineyard, God says, "*I the Lord do keep it . . . lest any hurt it; I will keep it night and day.*" The whole 91st Psalm is a manifold promise of protection from unseen dangers. It is a most singular fact in the history of Israel, that though they were always surrounded by enemies, they were yet, on the whole, very seldom attacked. The fear of God was upon the nations, as in the case of their father Jacob. (Gen. xxxv. 5).

By all the nations round about the people of God were hated. Why then did they not oftener combine to cut them off utterly, when at some moment they seemed specially weak? In place of Chushan-rish-a-thaim coming alone, Eglon alone, Jabin alone, and the Midianites in like manner, why did not they all come together, or such rulers of those kingdoms as were contemporaries—why did they come singly merely? And as to these Midianites, why do we not read of their coming to attack Israel long before this period, and how do we never hear of their return? And why should not the Philistines, the Moabites, and other nations have come forward now and crushed Israel to the very earth? There were a few occasions of this kind in the history of the people; but they were very few (see Ps. lxxxiii.). "The Lord is a wall of fire round about His Church," etc.

The missionaries to the Figi Islands, when threatened with destruction from the natives, had no means of defence except prayer. The savages heard them praying, were seized with trembling, and fled. They said afterwards, "We knew that your God was a strong God, and when we saw you crying to Him, we were afraid." How often are praying people saved just in time from some terrible accident, or from some fatal epidemic, or from some evil purpose of wicked men! (Ps. xxxiv. 20, 22; 1 Sam. ii. 9). Laban durst not carry out any evil design against Jacob (Gen. xxxi. 24). Neither could Satan himself proceed further against Job, or Peter ,than he was permitted (Job ii. 6; Luke xxii. 31, 32). God guards His people by putting a muzzle on the lions' mouths. Sometimes, in punishment for their sins, he takes off the muzzle and they rise up, and fall upon them with the weight of an avalanche.

V. The Readiness with which the Wicked Unite to Attack the Righteous.

These various tribes of the desert, all had frequent quarrels with each other. But we seldom hear of two of them uniting together to crush a third. Yet when one of them is about to attack Israel, others are wonderfully disposed to join in the attack, as if they had special pleasure in doing so (p. 70). (chap. iii. 13). This seems to be a special part of the reference in

Ps. lxxxiii. Pilot and Herod had a bitter feud among themselves. But they could agree in pouring contempt on the Saviour (Luke xxiii. 12). When Christ was crucified it was by a combination of enemies, who could all agree in that, though differing at a thousand points with each other. We see generally how they united in the days of the Judges, from chap. x. 11, 12, also ver. 7. (Acts iv. 27; John xv. 19).

CHAPTER VI.—*Verses* 11–24.

THE UNSEEN FRIEND.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**11. There came an angel of the Lord.**] Rather, "*the angel of the Lord came.*" The reference being to one particular person known already by that name (ch. ii. 1-5). He almost always personated Jehovah, or speaks in His name (Ex xxiii. 20-2; iii. 23; xiv. 19). He is generally supposed to have been the Messiah, the Son of God, anticipating the appearance He was to make in human form in the fulness of time. He had other names, such as "angel of His presence" (Isa. lxiii. 9). "Angel of the covenant" (Mal. iii. 1). Some think also that the "Shechinah," and "the glory of the Lord" are names of the Messiah.

Sat under an oak.] Sat *down* under *the* oak, or *terebinth* tree—one special tree of that kind, noted perhaps for its size, its umbrageous character, and its convenient position, so that it formed a suitable public meeting place. Some think there was a grove, or cluster of trees. Such a tree, of magnificent proportions, and wide-spreading branches, would afford a most grateful shade in a land of so much sunshine—comp. the "*palm-tree*" under which Deborah sat in performing her functions, as a prophetess (ch. iv. 5); also the "*juniper tree*" under which Elijah rested (1 Kings xix. 4). Certain trees were certainly of great importance in those times (Josh. xxiv. 26; Gen. xxxv. 4). A *well* was also an object of great importance, as in the case of the well "*Harod*" (ch. vii. 1); the well of "*Hagar*" (Gen. xvi. 14); the well of "*Bethlehem*" (2 Sam. xxiii. 15, 16); and "*Jacob's well*" (John iv. 6).

Which was in Ophrah.] So described to distinguish it from a place of the same name in Benjamin (Josh. xviii. 23; 1 Sam. xiii. 17). This Ophrah was a small town in the south-west of Manasseh, in the hill country, and near to Shechem. It was inhabited by a branch of the Abi-ezerite family, or clan. It appears to have been a secluded spot, in a rugged country, with rocks all round. Abiezer was a son of Gilead's sister (1 Chron. vii. 18). The name is given as *Jeezer* in Num. xxvi. 30, but *Abi-ezer* in Josh. xvii. 2, and also *here*.

That pertained to Joash the Abi-ezrite.] Joash, the father of Gideon, was head of the clan or house of Abi-ezer. The little town of Ophrah was Gideon's place of birth, of residence, and of burial (ch. vi. 11-24; viii. 32).

His son Gideon.] The name means *hewer* or *feller*, which well corresponds with what he did in hewing down the image of Baal; also with his being a man of great muscular strength, and a warrior. But for what reason he got the name, we are not told. Some think it was given him prophetically, He was the youngest son of the family, perhaps the only son now left (ch. viii. 18, 19). He was the fifth judge in Israel.

Threshed wheat.] It was customary in those times, and in early times generally, for those who owned property to engage, both themselves and the members of their family, in manual labour connected with their establishments. The ancient Roman senators did the same, *Cincinnatus, Curius, Scipio*, etc. חָבַט *to beat out with a stick*—not to *thresh* in the strict sense (Deut. xxiv. 20; Isa. xxvii. 12).

By the wine-press.] The usual manner of threshing wheat was to do it on open floors, or in places in the open field, that were rolled hard for the purpose with threshing carriages or threshing shoes, or else with oxen, which they drove about over the scattered sheaves to tread out the grains with their hoofs. Only poor people knocked out the little corn that they had gleaned with a stick (Ruth ii. 17), and Gideon did it so now, showing the extreme distress which prevailed in the land when a family such as his were reduced to adopt such an expedient as this. He beat it out in the pressing tub גַּת; which like all wine-presses was either sunk in the ground in a hole dug out, or else was a hollow scooped out in the rock (*Keil*). In either case, the purposes of concealment would be served. The men of the desert would not expect to find wheat in the wine-press; being in a pit, or hollow of the rock, it was not likely to be discovered; oxen not being employed in the process, there would be no lowing heard; and there being no machine, there would be no hum-drumming noise such as it usually makes.

הָנִיס *to make it safe from, lit.* to *make it fly from* (Ex. ix. 20). Threshing was usually performed by oxen (Deut. xxv. 4) upon floors (2 Sam. xxiv. 18) prepared for the purpose. At this season the operation of Gideon could be done in the wine-press, for the vintage season was four months after the wheat harvest.

12. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him.] It had already been said, "he came and sat down under the oak." Now it is said, he *appeared*. This implies something more than a stranger coming within sight. It seems to intimate that he made a *revelation* of himself to him. The Hebrew word used justifies this rendering; for יֵרָא is only used when the invisible Divine nature becomes visible *(Cassel)*. It also corresponds with the fact, that after the interview he vanished out of sight. The angel who came forward to withstand Balaam was for a time invisible to him (Num. xxii. 23, 25, 27 with verses 31, 34; 2 Kings vi. 17). Gideon was the only judge to whom the angel of the Lord had yet appeared in calling him to his special work.

The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.] This, though a common form of salutation (Ruth ii. 4), seems to have been spoken with significance in the present instance. The angel speaks of Gideon in a manner which appearances seem to justify. He was a young man, of noble countenance, of muscular build, and great natural strength; like the son of a king (ch. viii. 18). Perhaps, too, in this statement there is some slight intimation of the destiny or work reserved for Gideon; *q. d.*, Jehovah has marked thee out as His instrument for doing a great work, being naturally so well fitted for carrying it out, and he is now with thee and in thee for this purpose.

13. O my Lord, if Jehovah be with us, why is all this befallen us? Gideon's heart was sad, because of the loss of his own brethren (ch. viii. 18, 19), as well as because of the national calamities. But one thing encouraged him to speak out his mind with confidence to this stranger. He struck the right key-note in addressing a true Israelite. When the whole land was full of Baal, it was a relief to hear a voice raised in honour of Jehovah; and Gideon thought he recognised in this utterance of the stranger the true ring. It was the vein in which Gideon's heart loved to go out. Doubtless he had loved to think of the bright days of old when Jehovah was held to be Supreme, and all went well. And often must he have wished to find some congenial spirit with whom he could hold intercourse about the melancholy state of religion, throughout all the coasts of Israel. He was a man of the type referred to in Ezek. ix. 4; Mal. iii. 16, 17; Isa. lxii. 1, 6, 7. He therefore felt that this stranger, from the few words he had let fall, was a friend of the right stamp. But he did not know, nor suspect, at this stage, that he was addressed by a person of mysterious dignity.

His language means simply, O sir! how can you say Jehovah is with us, when all this has happened to us? It is impossible that our true King can be among us, when things are brought to the very last extremity! The wave of desolation that is passing over the land is clear proof of the absence of our God; for what god can contend with the God of Israel? His arm is never shortened that it cannot save, etc. (Isa. lix. 1). But it is as He threatened in Deut. xxxi. 16, 17. How can we for a moment suppose that the Lord is with us, when "He has delivered us into the hands of the Midianites?"] into the *grasp* of (*lit.* the *palm* of the hands). The word here translated *forsaken* means the same as *castaway* (Rom. xi. 2). Because they were brought so low as to burrow in the ground like beasts, and hide themselves in dens and in caves. Gideon's reply is significant, as showing what his heart was full of at the time, and God, who looks especially at what is passing in men's hearts, saw that from the state of his heart, he was a man of the right stamp to undertake the work of the people's deliverance.

14. And the Lord looked upon him] *i.e.*, He turned round with expressive gesture, and said in the attitude and tone of giving him a solemn charge. Not *the angel*, but *Jehovah* (as in Josh. vi. 2). This charge to go and deliver Israel manifestly implied the assumption of a prerogative, which belonged only to Israel's God—the Keeper and Shepherd of Israel. The closing words specially imply this (הֲלֹא) *"have not I sent thee?"* (Acts vii. 38). This phrase is a strong assertion of the fact, that the speaker had commissioned him. It is the same as saying, "Does not my statement, now solemnly made, bear witness to the fact that thou art commissioned?" (ch. iv. 14; Josh. i. 9).

From the hand of Midian.] From the *grasp*.

Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save, etc.] This is the formal commission given by the Keeper of Israel to him whom He had chosen for His instrument in effecting their deliverance. He now has a duty laid down for him to discharge. This involves a responsibility for himself, and a call to others to assist him in the work. Two things had been referred to as constituting a source of great strength. *Jehovah was with him*, and as regards his natural equipment as a man, *he was a mighty man of valour*. Both these are included in the phrase, "this thy might." It might be said he had an additional source of strength in the fact, that Jehovah had now formally commissioned him. For this necessarily conveyed a promise, that He would in all

respects qualify him sufficiently for the performance of the work. He sends "none a warfare on their own charges" (1 Cor. ix. 7). "His God would command his strength, and would make perfect that which concerned him." His own natural strength, though a small matter compared with the special Divine resources, which would be open to him, would yet not be despised; for it was God's natural gift, and in its place would go for something.

15. O my Lord! wherewith shall I save, etc.] Rather, *O Lord God.* He now addresses the stranger as *Jehovah;* believing from His speech, and whole manner, that he is a Divine person in human form. As such an idea seems too grand for any man to comprehend in a single moment, and as Gideon expressed no great surprise at the discovery made, we are disposed to think that here, as in many other parts of Scripture (as Peter's Sermon on the day of Pentecost, Acts ii. 14-36 and 40; Peter's Sermon in the house of Cornelius, Acts x. 34-43; Paul's Address on Mars' Hill, Acts xvii. 22-31—in all which, as well as other places, we have only the heads of the sermon delivered, and not the full verbatim report), we have only an abridgment or outline of what was actually said. It is enough, if the statement given conveys an infallibly accurate conception of what took place, although the whole of what was uttered is not recorded. If more had been said on this occasion than is here given, the discovery of the Divinity of the speaker may have come more gradually on Gideon, than seems to have been the case from what we read in the page.

Gideon does not question the ability of the speaker to accomplish the salvation of Israel. He is only full of doubts, about his own miserable qualifications for the task. "To choose me for so great a work seems passing strange. I am the last person in all Israel to be thought of. Manasseh, my tribe, itself has less influence than the others, for it is only a half tribe, to the west of Jordan. My family, or house, is among the poorest in Manasseh. And I am the least in my father's house. I am in every way disqualified for so vast an undertaking." Doubtless the thought often crossed his mind—"O that Israel were free! How cheerfully would I assist, were but an opportunity given, for lifting the nightmare from off my nation! I would lay my life on the altar, did I but see how the Church of God could be restored to freedom and honour." Now the answer comes, which solves the difficult problem, "*I will be with thee,* and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man," *i.e.*, as easily as thou couldst smite one man, or, at one blow. This was He who had been a wall of fire around Israel hitherto, and who had wrought all the miracles, which the fathers spoke so much of to the children. It was He who fainteth not, neither is weary, in turning round the wheels of Providence. Thus assured, Gideon questions no longer the possibility of the work being done.

My family is poor] *lit.* "*my thousand* (Num. i. 16) is the humblest in Manasseh," referring to the divisions and sub-divisions made in Ex. xviii. 25; Micah v. 2; Deut. xxxiii. 17. These were tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. The "thousand" meant the expansion of the family so as to include several sub-divisions.

I am the least in my father's house.] The person of least influence—as being the youngest, and his name therefore coming in at the bottom of the roll on all occasions. Also perhaps because of his singular modesty and disinterestedness, as he seems to have underrated his own qualities, and spoken highly of the merits of others. He was in the family of Joash, what David was in the family of Jesse—the least respected boy in the family circle. But God chose them both to do His work.

Gideon had hesitation, but it was the hesitation of modesty and self-distrust, not the hesitation of unbelief. He did not question God's power, but his own. Compare with the hesitation of *Moses* (Ex. iii. 11, etc., iv. 1-14); of *Barak* (ch. iv. 8); of *Saul* (1 Sam. x. 21, 22); of *Joshua* (Josh. i. 1-10); of *Jonah*, (Jonah i. 1-3); of *Jeremiah* (Jer. i. 6); of *Amos* (Amos vii. 14, 15). "The least fit are usually the most forward, and the most fit are the most backward, to undertake great offices (ch. ix. 8-15). True humility is the usual companion of true greatness (2 Cor. ii. 16, iii. 5; Eph. iii. 8)." (*Pulpit Com.*)

17. If now I have found grace in Thy sight, show me a sign. אוֹת—*A miraculous sign.* Gideon thought if the mysterious stranger would but eat and drink with him, it would be a conclusive proof of two things: first that he was really human, and next that he was friendly in his intentions (Luke xxiv. 41-43; Acts x. 41; John xxi. 9-13). But beyond that he was anxious for some decided proof that God had really called him to this work. He wished doubtless to see some work done which only God could do, to prove that it was really Jehovah that was calling him to this work, and it was no delusion. To none of the other judges was such favour shown. But the circumstances were such, as to necessitate a special degree of encouragement, to be given to him who should act the part of a deliverer. The tide of sin was strong, and the infliction of judgments was heavy. Gideon would have many a hard battle to fight all around him, as well as in the open field against the stern foe. He must know that the God who had done wonderful things for His people aforetimes still lived, and that His love to Israel was as strong as ever it had been in all the ages of the past.

The phrase, found grace in Thy sight, is common in Scripture (Gen. xviii. 3, xxxiii. 10; Ex xxxiii. 13; 1 Sam. xxvii. 5; Esther vii. 3).

18. Depart not hence, etc., till I come and bring my present]—*offering*, or *sacrifice*. The word *minchah* may stand for either. The Sept. and Vulg. render it *sacrifice*. We understand it rather to mean *a gift offered to God as King*, a *meat offering*—such food as was given only to the specially favoured guests (*Speak. Com.*). It was a kind of eucharistic gift presented to God as King (Lev. ii. 1-6), the unbloody meat offering. In Gen. iv. 3-5 it means sacrifice generally. To have accepted a meat offering at Gideon's hands, would have been to confer on him the honour of His friendship, and the favour of His protecting shield.

19. Gideon made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes.] Here are two things in which Gideon showed especial respect to the stranger. He gave him a *kid*. Animal food is never provided except for visitors of superior rank, when a kid, or a lamb, and sometimes even a calf, is killed (Gen. xviii. 7). The other circumstance is, that *the ephah* was generally the quantity used for a whole household of ten persons, being nearly a bushel of flour (Matt. xiii. 33). It was equal to tenomers, yet *one* omer was the daily portion of manna allowed to one person, as being amply sufficient to supply all wants (Ex. xvi. 16). To present a whole ephah to one person therefore was a mark of the deepest respect; and more especially at such a time as this, when great scarcity prevailed all over the land.

Unleavened cakes.] Not *soured*, but sweet. Also these were quickly prepared, and were best suited as an offering to God (Gen. xix. 3; Ex. xii. 39; 1 Sam. xxviii. 24; Lev. ii. 11).

Presented it.] Set it before the stranger, and awaited his commands (Amos v. 25). In this interview with the angel, Gideon did not wish any others to be present, and so to dispense with assistants he put the flesh into a basket, and the broth into a pot, and brought it out himself.

20. Angel of God.] *Elohim*, not *Jehovah*. Yet it is the same person who is spoken of, implying that both are one. **This rock]** or stone, used as an altar on which any thing was laid that was presented to God—an unhewn rock (Ex. xx. 25).

Pour out the broth] as a *drink offering* (Gen. xxxv. 14). (*Speak. Com.*)

21. End of the staff that was in his hand]—that which a traveller carries with him (Gen. xxxii. 10; Ex. xii. 11). The sign of *fire* was given (Lev. ix. 24; 1 Chron. xxi. 26). This was the answer to the request made in verse 17. It implied the acceptance of Gideon's offering (Gen. xv. 17; 2 Chron. vii. 1; 1 Kings xviii. 38). It had also a deep symbolical meaning.

22. Alas! O Lord God!] *lit. O Lord Jehovah*—an exclamation sometimes of vexation and disappointment (as Josh. vii. 7), and sometimes of apprehension that some terrible issue is to come out of what is happening (Jer. iv. 10; Ezek. iv. 14; Jer. xxxii. 17). Here it expresses dread at having seen the angel Jehovah, or God Himself, which according to the popular belief, no man could do, and continue to live. This belief seems to have had for its foundation, Ex. xxxiii. 20. But what was really seen on this occasion, and indeed on all other occasions, was not the actual Person of Jehovah, but only the appearance of a man personating Jehovah (Gen. xxxii. 24, 30, 31; John i. 18; xiv. 9; ch. xiii. 21). (See also Ex. xx. 19; xxxiii. 20; Deut. v. 24-26; ch. xiii. 22).

For because I have seen.] *Lit. for therefore*, an idiomatic phrase, which is only a strong form of using the word *because* (*Lias*). Others translate it *for to this end have I seen an angel—that I might die* (*Keil*). The former sense, which indeed is that of the A. V. seems better (Gen. xxxiii. 10).

23. The Lord said, Peace unto thee, etc.] He said, probably by vision, or some audible voice, not by inward suggestion so likely, Peace is meant, not Trouble, by this visit. It has been given to comfort you (Jer. xxix. 11). You are mistaken in your fears. Comp. John xx. 21, 26; Gen. xxi. 17; xvi; Dan. x. 12, 19; Matt. xxviii. 5; Luke ii. 10; xxiv. 36-38).

24. Built an altar unto the Lord, etc.] Partly out of gratitude for the sparing of his life; partly to mark the spot as sacred, where so glorious a Person had stood; partly to express his sense of the honour that had been done to him; and chiefly perhaps, to consecrate the place where he had received a Divine commission to become the saviour of his people. He manifestly did not intend to make this altar a spot, on which sacrifices might be regularly offered in Divine worship. This would have been expressly condemned as being against the fixed law appointed for Divine worship in Israel. Only in the place which God should specially choose to put His name there, was it allowable to offer sacrifices in the way of regular worship (Deut. xii. 5, 6, 11-14). The mere semblance of departure from this rule was denounced as a great trespass of Divine law (Josh. xxii. 16, 19, 28). But any place where God appeared was in some sense sacred, and Gideon's object appears to have been as described above. It was especially a memorial and witness of the theophany vouchsafed to him, on the occasion of God's sending him forth to be the saviour of His people.

Jehovah—Shalom.] *Jehovah—Peace.* Comp. the names, *Jehovah-jireh*, (Gen. xxii. 14); *Jehovah-nissi* (Ex. xvii. 15); *Jehovah-Tsidkenu* (Jer. xxiii. 6); *Jehovah-Shammah* (Ezek. xlviii. 35). Here the phrase means simply, "*The Lord is peace*"—or peaceful. It is similar to the New Testament name of God—"the God of peace." But that is a fixed and permanent name, denoting the settled attitude of God in dealing with guilty men, now that the great propitiation has been made. In Old Testament times, the light shed on God's character was more flickering. The force of the title on this occasion was, that the Divine visit made to Gideon was one of peace—peace to himself, and peace to Israel. Jehovah's anger was now turned away, and now He was to bless His people with peace (Isa. xii. 1; Ps. xxix. 11).

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 11-24.

The Visit of the Unseen Friend.

Israel's darkest night had come. Her last star had gone down, and a pitiless storm swept through all her borders. The enemy had come in like a flood, and swallowed up her every possession. Her beautiful land was turned into a wilderness. Her cornfields were wasted; her fig trees were barked; her vines and olives stripped bare; her harvest fruits were destroyed; and her children were compelled to burrow in the ground for habitations, or to flee to the mountain crags, or to dens and caves, in their search for shelter from their marauding foe. For seven long years, this sinning people lay helpless and bleeding, under the heel of the oppressor, learning the sad lesson, that the greatest enemy of man is man.

But man's extremity is God's opportunity. Though no sign in the horizon indicates that help is at hand; though the heavens do not thunder against the oppressor, and the stars in their courses do not fight against him, though no powerful army comes to the rescue, Israel is yet not without a Friend in this hour of extreme peril. One who, though unseen, has been a deeply interested witness of the tragic scene, now steps forward to act the part of a Friend in this emergency. Silently, as the dew falls, and unobserved, he shows himself. As a traveller, staff in hand, but of princely form and expressive countenance. He enters into conversation with one of Israel's disconsolate sons; a few simple words are spoken; a command is given; a flash of fire springs out of the hard rock, and the stranger disappears. But, during that short interview, a rift begins to appear in the clouds of Israel's distresses. And though, for a moment the secret is kept, soon it appears, that a movement has begun, which will quickly put another colour on the whole course of events. It gets whispered that He who walks on the waters, and gathers the winds in His fists, has already sent forth the word—Be still! and ere long there must be a great calm! Such is the matter we have now to consider. Though it was the visit of only *one* friend, His presence to Israel at this time was invaluable. The sheep, however numerous, can do nothing against the attack of the lion without the Shepherd. Little children, in an emergency, are helpless without the presence of father and mother.

I. The Unseen Friend.

1. Who He was. "The angel of the Lord appeared to him" (verse 12). It might be read, *the angel-Jehovah.* It was manifestly not one of the ordinary heavenly messengers, who, however superior they may be to men, and however brilliant they may be both in wisdom and prowess, yet dare not assume the prerogative of Deity, or speak in the name of Jehovah. But this is always done by him who is styled the angel-Jehovah. The name Jehovah is given him interchangeably with that of the angel of the Lord (comp. verses 11, 12 20 21

22 with verses 14, 16, 15). None, however, could claim to speak and act as God, and show that he possessed the power of God, but He who really was God. Only one Person corresponds with this description—the second Person of the glorious God-head, who was, in the fulness of time, to become "God manifest in the flesh," and who now by anticipation, at special seasons, made needful revelations to His Church.

He is sometimes called "The Messenger or Angel of the Covenant" (Mal. iii. 1), "The Angel who redeems from all evil" (Gen. xlviii. 16), and "The Angel of His Presence" (Isa. lxiii. 9).

This friend of His people, if still unseen, is no longer unknown, for "He was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, etc." (John i. 14). In the man Christ Jesus, we have one who is all, and more, in these New Testament times, than the unseen Guardian was to the church of old. In Him we have not an *angel*, but a *man* associated with the Divine name, Who is at once "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," and yet is also "the Mighty God, and the everlasting Father,"—whose appearances are no longer shadowy and vanishing, but are for ever fixed in the form of a man at the helm of universal power, "far above all principality, and power, and might, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." We must know *Who* He is, *where* He is, and *what power* He has to preserve every one of His people, till they reach the world of glory.

2. The relation which He bore to Israel. That this angel was something more than a mere spectator of the sufferings of God's people, however sympathetic, is abundantly manifest from the accounts given of Him in the different places where He appeared. (1.) It was this angel Jehovah that appeared in the flame of fire in a bush, when Moses was called to arise and deliver Israel from bondage (Acts vii. 30). It was He who announced His presence by saying, "I am the God of the Fathers, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," and who gave as the reason for His coming down, "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people, and I am come down to deliver them." Thus He stands to Israel in the close relation of being their God, and claiming them for Himself as His special property. He was their *Owner* or *Possessor*. (2.) But He was also their *Redeemer*, for it was the same Divine Person who spake to Moses at the bush, who also sent him to Pharaoh with the message, "Let my people go that they may serve me;" it was He who sent all the plagues on Egypt, who destroyed the first-born of that country, and brought out Israel with a high hand, who went before them in the pillar of cloud, dried up the sea for them to pass over, went in behind Israel to protect them from the Egyptians, and finally brought the waters on Pharaoh and all his host, so that they were drowned in the sea (Ex. iii. 10; vi.; vii.–xi.; xii. 29–42; xiii. 21, 22; xiv. 19–31). (3.) He also became their *Lawgiver*. For we are told (Acts vii. 38) it was from this same "angel that Moses received the lively oracles to give unto us, on Mount Sinai." Then He appeared clothed with all the Majesty and authority of the Supreme Jehovah, and exhibiting a special jealousy for all His Sovereign rights in His own Person. We hear of Him also (4 as their *Guardian Angel*, specially appointed to take charge of this people, during their wilderness journey, to conduct them to their journey's end, and to put them in possession of the promised inheritance (Ex. xxiii. 20–23). The language is used by God the Father, "My name is in Him," implying that He, too, is God. This arrangement was confirmed in Ex. xxxii. 34 and xxxiii. 2). But there is a marked difference in the two passages quoted; in the one case it is "*Mine* angel shall go before thee," in the other it is, "I will send *an* angel before thee." In the former case, it is the special angel, the angel-Jehovah, that is referred to, who has no compeer among the angels of God; in the other case, it is one out of

the common class of angels. Moses fully appreciated the vast difference, and prayed earnestly that He *who represented God's presence* might be sent, and no other. Only one could take this place—the Son of God, the Second Person of the Godhead, whose office it is to reveal the Father, and therefore to represent His presence (Ex. xxxiii. 12, and 14, 15). The language "my presence" is emphatic; it is the same as saying, "He who represents my presence shall go with thee." Hence the reference in Isa. lxiii. 9, "The Angel of His presence." —(See *Henderson* in loco.)

It was specially in *His capacity of Guardian Angel* that He now appeared—as "*the Keeper of Israel*"—their great Friend, who had them in charge, to lead and guide them, to defend them from all enemies, Gen. xlviii. 16, and bestow on them all the blessings of the covenant; but also to see that they should act as an obedient people, and keep the covenant of their God. The relation was thus most intimate and manifold.

To the Church of God on earth in these latter times, the Saviour is intimately allied. With every member of it, He becomes personally and intimately associated on the day when he receives Christ as his Saviour. He then gives himself to Christ, and Christ in all His fulness gives himself to the believing, penitent sinner. From that moment they become one, and are more intimately allied than brothers of the same family circle. Jesus is ever afterwards known as that sinner's friend, his Redeemer, his Lord and Master, his Guide through Life, his Guardian in danger, his Keeper at all times, his Shepherd to provide him with pasture, and prevent him from wandering, and his Bestower of all the gifts and graces contained in "the everlasting covenant."

3. His constant presence with them. Though seldom seen, He was ever present with this people to bless them, and to do them good. Being His redeemed ones, and chosen for Himself as His peculiar people, He took the deepest interest in them, and in terms of the promise made, followed them to the place of the appointed rest. In fidelity to the trust given Him by Jehovah, He watched over them every moment, lest any hurt should arise to objects so beloved; and, in all their journeyings, He bore them as on eagle's wings (Isa. xxvii. 3; Deut. xxxii. 9–11; Ex. xix. 4; Isa. lxiii. 11–14). All through the trackless desert He guided them, with sleepless eye caring for them, Himself unseen (Ps. cvii. 2–7), saving them at one time from such enemies as the Amalekites (Ex. xvii. 13, 14), again from the fiery flying serpents (Num. xxi. 8), again from the curse of Balaam (Num. xxii. 31–35; xxiii. 5, 16; do. 23), and again from the armies of two mighty kings on the threshold of the territories of the Canaanites, Sihon and Og. He also dried up the Jordan before them, and appeared as the Captain of the Lord's host, when the wars against the Canaanites were about to begin (Josh. v. 13–15). It was by His mighty power also, that all these nations were slain before the sword of Joshua (Ps. xliv. 3).

Jesus still goes personally with every one of His people, every step of the way, on to the place of the promised rest, Himself unseen, but not the less really taking charge of His redeemed ones, treating them substantially in the same manner, and acting on the same principles as of old. His language is, "Lo! I am with you alway unto the end." He is "the Beginner and the Finisher of their faith" (Matt. xxviii. 20; Heb. xii. 2; xiii. 5; Psalms lxxiii. 24; 2 Tim. iv. 18).

4. The rarity of His appearances. It might be thought if He was so closely allied to this people—more intimately related than father to children, brother to brother, or husband to wife—then it is singular He should so seldom show Himself. If His presence is so essential to the safe conduct and the comfort of His people, why does He not oftener look through the window, showing Himself

through the lattice (Cant. ii. 9)? Nay, if, in point of fact, He is always near, why does He not give unmistakeable signs of His presence? How much might not the consciousness of His presence do to cheer His people under their sorrows, to lighten their burdens, relieve their anxious fears, and enable them to run with patience the Christian race! Yet we hear of His appearing only once to Joshua on the threshold of His great work, only once, too, at the time when the people were left without a leader, to see if they could of themselves obey the covenant of their God (ch. ii. 1-5), and now a third time after a lapse of more than 200 years when the whole nation was brought to the brink of ruin. Why should it be so?

(1.) These visits were *too precious to be often repeated.* It is but glimpses of glory that can be expected on earth. It is not the normal state of things to make revelations of the Divine brightness in such a world as this. It would be a departure from the fixed rule to do so. The cases are therefore strictly exceptional; and even the glimpses which are given are made only to the people of God. There was only one Mount of Transfiguration scene permitted to the disciples in this world, and that quickly came and quickly vanished. This earth is too polluted a spot for any long continued enjoyment of the Divine presence.

(2.) *The rule in the present state, is to walk by faith, and not by sight.* This rule is necessary for putting the soul through a most healthful discipline, and enabling it to learn lessons which it could learn so well in no other way. It becomes the means of acquiring a degree of self knowledge from experience, which it never could arrive at otherwise—the knowledge of its entire spiritual helplessness, its want of a righteousness of its own, its innate treachery, its difficulty of loving God, and trusting in Him when unseen, and many other things of a very humbling character. It leads to a gradual exposure of the human heart to itself. It is also the appointed means of our justification before God, through the merits of the Saviour, and so illuminates the fact, that we deserve no manifestations of God's brightness whatever. Hence, till we learn this lesson thoroughly they are but sparingly made. It is also the means of producing our sanctification, of enabling us to overcome all opposition to our entrance into heaven, and preparing many of the materials of the joy of that state. (1 Peter i. 7; 2 Cor. iv. 18).

(3.) *Our sins and backslidings prevent many visits.* (Isa. lix. 2; Hos. v. 15; vi. 1, etc.) From those who obey not His voice, but cast His laws behind their backs, He hides His face, and they receive little or no manifestations of His favour, as in the passages quoted (see also Isa. lvii. 17; i. 15). This was realised often in the days of the Judges, and never more than during the period referred to in this chapter. On the other hand, "His secret is with them that fear Him," etc. (Ps. xxv. 14); to the man who walks before Him with a perfect heart He reveals Himself, as to Moses (Ex. xxxiii. 11, also 18–23). "The meek He will teach His way." "To that man will I look, even to him that is poor," etc. (Ps. xxv. 9; Isa. lxvi. 2). "To the man that keepeth His commandments, He will manifest Himself to him" (John xiv. 21; Gen. xviii. 17, 19).

5. His appearance at the proper moment. He saw all His people's affliction at the hands of these cruel sons of the desert, and though they were punished less than their iniquities deserved, His heart was yet touched with pity for them, and long ere the full cup of merited suffering was emptied, He appeared as He did to Moses in the bush, to tell them how "in all their afflictions He was afflicted," and that now in His love He was come to redeem them. At that point, when they had bitter trial of the severity of the rod on the one hand, but had not yet experienced any wholesale destruction of human life on

the other, though nearing that point, the angel appears. His heart yearned over them, as if they had "received at the Lord's hand double for all their sins" (Isa. xl. 2). At the moment when the metal was beginning to consume, He at once snatches it from the fire. Already a famine seems to have begun (Ruth i. 1), and had the terrible incubus from the desert continued to rest longer on the land, the people must soon have perished in tens of thousands. But just then He appeared for their rescue, "according to the multitude of His loving kindnesses" (Isa. lxiii. 7). He who "sent out a strong west wind, and swept off the swarms of locusts that covered the land of Egypt, so that there remained not one in all the coasts" (Ex. x. 19), now does a similar thing with these barbarous hordes (Jud. viii. 10, 12, 28).

The Jews have a proverb that, "*when the tale of bricks is doubled, then comes Moses.*" The Redeemer of Israel cannot see the destruction of His people. He never departs from this rule—"I will correct thee in measure. I will not make a full end of thee." Other nations were mere common property. His people were His jewels. "I gave Egypt for thy ransom," etc. "I have engraven thee on the palms of my hands."

6. The purpose of His appearance. He came to rid the land of the enemy and grant salvation to His people. In that people, notwithstanding their present apostasy, He saw the church of the living God, the only people that represented the true God in all the earth, the people whose history carried in it the germ of a great Divine plan, to be revealed to future ages, by which the Divine glory would be far more brightly illustrated than in any other manner, down through unending time. Through this people the name of Jehovah should become known and worshipped, among all nations, in the future of the world's history. But now all their prospects as a nation were placed in great jeopardy. Wherefore "He looked, but there was none to help; He wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore His own arm brought salvation," etc. (Psa. lxiii. 5). He appears on their behalf, according to the jealousy He bears to his great name. Formerly He came as a reprover of their sins (ch. ii. 1-5). Now He comes to raise up a deliverer, whom He will employ as an instrument to save them from all the consequences of their sins.

The land has first to be purged of its sins. Till that is done, the finger of Jehovah will not be uplifted for salvation. The work of reformation must be proved to exist. Baal's altars must be thrown down, and the altar of Jehovah erected in their place. It must be made visible, that the name of Jehovah is again accepted as that of the God of Israel. Battle must also be bravely given to the terrible foe, that brooded like a nightmare over the rich plains of Israel. For an undertaking so difficult, no ordinary qualifications were required. The whole power, indeed, came from the Divine Deliverer Himself. Yet, as God is always pleased to work by means, He employs the fittest instrument that can be found.

Notwithstanding all our sins, it is wonderful how often our gracious Redeemer appears for our salvation, when, for many strong reasons, we might have expected Him to come for our destruction (see Ps. cvi. 43, 45; Ps. lxxviii. 37, 38).

7. His manner of revealing Himself. He comes in a tone, or manner suited to the conduct, or condition of the people at different times. There is design and meaning in the *manner*, as well as in the expressed *purpose* of revealing Himself. Now, there are no lightnings in His hands. He is not compassed about with dark clouds. No earthquake heralds His coming. The earth does not shake and tremble at His goings. The pestilence does not go before Him, nor do burning coals spring up under His feet. He comes like the small rain

on the tender herb. As a wayfaring man, leaning on His staff, as if wearied with His journey, and sitting down to rest. He comes peaceably, and not in anger. He disturbs not a leaf on the tree, though it were easy for Him to scatter the everlasting mountains, and cause the perpetual hills to bow. All the power of omnipotence slumbered in His arm; the strength of many armies lay in His word. But He keeps back His resources out of sight, He hides His power from observation to see whether men will trust His word. He will make no vain show of His resources, but put forth only the one atom of His power, which is needed to justify faith in His Divine character.

8. **His personal character.** (1.) He is *Almighty.* There are no cases of distress too hard for our heavenly friend to remove. He is able to make "the worm Gideon thresh the mountains and to make the hills as chaff." "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Gideon's faith was not difficult to awaken. It was kindled at once, when he saw the fire spring up from the rock, and consume the sacrifice. He believed that behind that there was infinite strength—that, indeed, this was He who had done all the wonders from the days of the land of Egypt. Neither should more proof be needed to believe in the resources of the "Captain of our Salvation," when, besides many other evidences, we behold this one, that He is able to pour out the Spirit from on high, the universal Comforter of the church of Christ. This is the greatest of all the forms of power which God puts forth. Then he creates the soul anew.

(2.) *He is faithful.* He never forgets nor forsakes the objects of His charge, though centuries had now passed since first He received it, when this people became a free nation. During that long period His faithfulness did not fail, but, amid all the lights and shadows of that greatly chequered history, this covenant-keeping Friend was at his post, and brought His charge safely through every peril according to the terms of his trust. "Those whom the Father gave me I have kept, and none of them is lost" (John x. 28, 29; vi. 39; 2 Tim. i. 12; iv. 8; do. 18).

(3.) *He is tender.* It is not His manner even to "break the bruised reed." He does not now break forth into a severe reprimand of Gideon, for seeming to find fault with God's Providence in allowing His people to suffer so much while He stood aloof from them. Though Gideon was charging his God foolishly, He yet knew that at heart he was an Israelite indeed, but was overwhelmed with sorrow at the condition of affairs in the land. There were also other wounds made in Gideon's heart, and now bleeding afresh, arising from the loss of his brothers at Mount Tabor, who were there barbarously slain by Zebah, and Zolmunna. These wounds he now tenderly upbinds (Ps. cxlvii. 3). Instead of upbraiding, He speaks to him "good and comfortable words." "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter." How tenderly He deals with the weak side in His disciple's character, his unsteadfastness to his Master in the hour of peril!

(4.) *He is full of sympathy.* He felt the afflictions suffered by the various tribes, as if they had been His own. "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." He was now virtually saying to them anew, "he that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." The pain of the members of the body goes at once to the head, the fountain of sensation (ch. x. 16; Zech. ii. 8). "I have seen the affliction of my people, have heard their cry, and know their sorrows, and now I am come down to deliver them." It is as if He could not enjoy His repose in heaven, while His people were suffering such cruelties on earth. When they are persecuted, it is He that bleeds. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *Me?*" This truly is a Friend in need, and a Friend indeed.

(5.) *He is unchanging.* His general character is given, as being "without variableness, or shadow of turning" He is the same trustworthy Friend now

that He was in the days of Joshua, when He brought the people into the land, or as in the days of Moses, when He led such a large congregation safely through all the perils of the wilderness. "Having loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them to the end."

"Nor death, nor life, nor earth, nor hell,
Nor time's destroying sway,
Can e'er efface us from His heart,
Or make His love decay."

"Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above,
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death."

(6.) *He is undying.* "He carried them all the days of old," and still while generation after generation dies, He lives on through all ages the ever-present, ever interested, ever-watchful Protector of His Church. For three centuries already He had led this people through all changes, and still to this day, He was as much as ever "mighty to save." His name at first, when He took this people by the hand, was given as the great "I am"—the ever-living, self-existent One. And now as far on as the days of *Gideon*, He is still "the Lord of Hosts, strong and mighty in battle." *David* sings of Him as One "of whose years there is no fail." *Isaiah* adores Him as "The Everlasting Father." *Jeremiah* rejoices in "His love as an everlasting love." *Micah* hails Him as One, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." And when he changed His form from *angel* to *man*, we find Him in the latest ages of the sacred record, "walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, as One like unto the Son of Man," proclaiming as He looks towards the limitless future, "Behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. i. 13, 18). Through all time, His language to His people is, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

II. The instrument of His choice.

Though God could accomplish His purposes among men, without the intervention of any human instrumentality, it is His fixed rule to act in all ordinary cases by the use of means. Even in cases where miraculous power is employed, this rule is not departed from; for the miraculous power is employed only to do what ordinary means could not do, or it is put forth in special cases to prove that the power comes directly from God. But where ordinary means can serve every purpose, these only are employed; and, when selected, they are always of the fittest. God always honours the use of natural means, for it is the order He has laid down in His creation, and He must respect His own arrangements. Miracle is therefore the exception; natural means the rule. Hence, on this occasion, Gideon was chosen to act as an instrument in God's hand in doing the work. He was chosen because of his natural qualifications fitting him for the work; and other qualifications were specially given to him to render him still more qualified.

1. He was selected by the Angel-Jehovah Himself. (p. 143). This appears at once from reading the narrative without any confirmatory statement. It was the angel's express command, that gave Gideon the right to act as a saviour to his people, and this too made him responsible for fulfilling this mission. He was not merely an extraordinary character created by extraordinary times. Several have been so raised up—such as Buonaparte, Washington, Alfred, Cromwell, Knox, and others. But the heroes of Israel were nothing without the Divine aid and guidance of Him who called them to the work. They were

always held in the hand of another, and had to obey the will of that other. There was only one real Deliverer, in all the ages of that unparalleled history—the Angel-Jehovah. As held by Him, Israel's heroes were invincible under any possible circumstances; as acting of themselves, they were weak, and as other men. If then all the power really came from the Angel-Jehovah, manifestly He must choose His own instrument. The commonly received rule, *vox populi, vox Dei,*" does not apply here.

2. He was taken from a very unlikely place. Othniel was taken from the tribe of Judah, Ehud from Benjamin, and Barak from Naphtali. For the most part God finds His instrument at hand, where the danger is to be met. He does not need to bring him from afar, for anyone close at hand He can make serviceable for His purpose. The danger now to be met, was partly in the tribe of Issachar, and partly in that of cis-jordanic Manasseh. Of all places in the land, in this half-tribe of Manasseh idolatry was the most rampant; and precisely here was the instrument of the angel found. No places suffered more from the inroads of these spoilers, than those which formed the richest portions of this tribe, and none had so determinedly put aside the name of Jehovah, and addicted themselves to the worship of Baal. The old Canaanites had continued in Megiddo, Dor, Ibleam, Taanach, and Bethshean (ch. i. 27). All over this district the altars of Baal were upreared, and there were none zealous enough, or powerful enough to deal with this public scandal, among the people who were pledged in every way to worship only Jehovah. In the heart of this country Gideon was found. It might be said, can any good thing come out of idolatrous Manasseh? and the answer might well be given, Come and see! It is like Saul of Tarsus being taken from among the Pharisees, or Dionysius the Areopagite taken from Athens. He who could raise up an Obadiah in the court of Ahab and Jezebel, can also bring forth a man to *fell* the image of Baal all over the land, from the very headquarters of idol-worship in his day.

3. In what circumstances did the Angel find him? It is always an important question to ask, *where* a man is found, or how situated, when God calls him, in the case of conversion from sin to God, at the day of death, or some special occasion of duty when a stern act of self-denial is required. *Moses* when called was in the "backside of the desert," a most lonely spot; *David* was found following the ewes; *Elisha* was ploughing in the field with oxen; *the Apostles* were washing and mending their nets; and *Gideon* was threshing wheat. Similarly *Cincinnatus, Curius, Scipio* (Roman Senators) were called from agricultural pursuits to occupy high positions in the State—*Joseph* was even called from a prison to occupy the seat next the throne in Egypt. These were all doing their duty in some humble station meekly and uncomplainingly, content with the lot which God had marked out for them—"faithful in that which is least." So it was with Gideon. But his thoughts were not in his work. They were with the Church of God, its sorrowful present and its dark future. If any work was to be done for that Church, he was just the man to throw his whole heart into it.

4. The immediate reason of the Divine visit. Most probably in answer to *prayer*. In the severely abridged account given of all circumstances in the Book of God, it is little wonder if we do not hear much of Gideon's private exercises before his God. But we can hardly suppose such a man of faith and zeal for the cause of God, to be other than a wrestler with God in secret, that he "would arise and plead the cause that was his own." Partly in answer to these prayers did the angel come to him. Also his *concern was deep at the low state of true religion in the land.* Most of those around him were "hasting after other gods." Jehovah's altar was deserted; Israel had fallen into the sins of the old Canaanites; and now the tide of judgment had come up in all her

borders to such a degree, as to threaten the extinction of the nation. Gideon's heart was wrung with grief when he saw Jehovah's name so much dishonoured (Ps. cxix. 136, 158). Often must he have "sighed and cried in prayer, as he thought of all the abominations done in the land." If he could but see a way, he was heartily prepared to lay himself on the altar, to devote himself for the emancipation of his country, and for the re-establishment of the worship of God in the land. On the principle, therefore, that God honours them that honour Him, he is now chosen of God to do the greatest work which that age admitted of, in rescuing his bleeding country from ruin, and restoring the name Jehovah to honour and worship all over the land.

5. **His personal fitness for the work.** His good qualities were manifold, all marking him out as a suitable agent.

(1.) *His physical qualities.* These, though inferior to others, are yet in their place important. God does not despise any gifts or faculties, with which He Himself has endowed a man. It was an element of fitness for the work on this occasion, that Gideon was a "mighty man of valour;" that he was of princely appearance, was physically strong, and able to go through much bodily hardship; and, further, that he was skilful in the use of weapons, and a chivalrous champion in the field. That a bold and dauntless spirit was needed to meet the emergency was most manifest. One who would skulk behind the bush, and conceal himself from all danger, was of no service whatever. Neither could he be Israel's leader on such an occasion as this, who could not bravely set his face against terrible odds, and who, though faint with toil, could not yet pursue. But Gideon was robust and muscular, of sinewy, iron frame, and firm nerve. And his whole bearing in this remarkable juncture was marked by intrepid courage and invincible resolution.

(2.) *His mental qualities.* These are of a higher order, and pre-eminently needed in the conducting of a great enterprise. We do not say he was a man of more than average learning, just as he was not a king's son, nor a prince of the tribe to which he belonged. To be pre-eminent in rank or learning was not essential. But the possession of great natural shrewdness, of sound judgment, and quick discernment; ability to grasp at once the full magnitude and great difficulty of the work before him; the possession of wisdom and tact how best to lay out the few resources within his reach; constructive power in arranging the best plan, or order of battle; fertility in devising expedients and manœuvres, and ways of taking advantage of all the shifting scenes and incidents of the crisis; especially the power of managing men, inspiring hearts with courage and hope to which they had long been strangers, wakening up even the faint hearted to a pitch of enthusiasm, to have the soldiers thoroughly in harmony with their leader, and to gain their entire confidence, and to be able to bring the whole force to bear as one man on the object which is sought to be gained—all these qualities Gideon did possess in an eminent degree, and so was eminently the man for the occasion on this side of his character.

(3.) *His moral qualities.* These are higher still, and in these Gideon yet more excelled. To be able to rise with the occasion, to realise the worth of the precious interests with which he was entrusted, to appreciate the value of the right moment when it occurred, and to lose not a moment in seizing it, to lose himself in the greatness of his duty, and have no other thought but nobly to discharge it, to be daring and dashing in his movements, while yet full of caution and self-restraint—these are the features which distinctly mark the man of God's selection on this occasion. Who could have thought that the same man should have been so humble, diffident, and shrinking—so overpowered with a consciousness of his own weakness, putting himself down as less than the least in all Israel, and entirely losing sight of himself in his sympathy with his

suffering brethren, and the sacred cause now almost lost, which had been committed to their hands? Yet, these are the very features of character, which fit a man for true greatness in the Church of God. "Before honour is humility."

Though so disinterested and unselfish as to suppose that the angel's salutation did not apply to him personally, when He said "The Lord is with *thee*" but rather to the people of Israel as a whole, and so he replied—"with *us*;" and though he entirely passed over the flattering allusion to his being "a mighty man of valour," yet, with all this low estimate of himself, when summoned to do work for his God, he rises to the strongest conviction of the sacredness of his duty, and becomes fearless and defiant of danger, when he has reason to believe that his God is with him ordering the battle.

(4.) *His religious qualities.* These are highest of all. Pre-eminent among these was the fact of *his deep sorrow for the sins of the land.* This was distinctive of such men as Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, and David, who did so much in their day to bring down a Divine blessing on the land when it seemed to be forsaken of its God. Now it appears to have been so with Gideon. That there should have been *so much of Baal, and so little of Jehovah, in Israel* in these past years, appears to be the undertone of his lamentation in his first answer to the angel. And the same spirit comes out more decidedly when, in obedience to the Divine command, at great risk to himself, *he cut down the grove and the image of Baal. His readiness to obey the Divine call*, when assured that he really was called of God, is most beautiful. For his only objection is, not that the sacrifice was too great to make, involving in all probability the loss of life itself, but that he was so weak an instrument to be taken into God's hand. He was able to do so little. So glorious a cause would suffer by being put into such unworthy hands. But when assured that he was really called, he readily obeys—a pleasing contrast even to the case of Moses, who seemed for a time most unwilling to enter on the duty which God imposed upon him (see Ex. iv. 10–14). Gideon seemed never to murmur at any measure of self-sacrifice, which his call to this duty would entail upon him. His whole manner seemed to say, "Here am I send me!"

He had *true loyalty to the God of Israel.* Though all besides should follow Baal, and though Baal's altar should be raised in his father's house, and be acknowledged by all its inmates, he would bow the knee only to Jehovah. He was not ashamed of the name of his God, neither w he afraid, though he should stand altogether alone. If it must be so, he shall be

"Faithful found among the faithless, faithful only he."

But his chief characteristic of all, was his *faith in the God of Israel* as his own God. It was the entire trust he placed in his God, and the full confidence he had in Him that enabled him to face the huge mountain of difficulty that lay before him. His case was greatly like that of the stripling king, who was first brought into notice by his faith, when he said to the doughty giant, "Thou comest to me with sword and spear—I come to thee in the name of the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." (1 Sam. xvii. 45). Gideon's heart was given to the God of Israel, and he seemed never to doubt but that He could repeat in his own day all the wonders of the old time, were He but to decide so to do. It was certainly a splendid illustration of faith, and one most glorifying to God, for a man to set himself to the task, without a murmur, simply at God's call, of advancing with a handful of 300 men, to meet a host of warriors numbering 135,000, and hope firmly that he would gain a complete victory because the God of Jacob had promised to give His presence. His confidence in his God carried him over all the fear he might naturally cherish from man.

III. Lessons taught by the interview.

1. True mourners for sin are sure to meet with God as a Comforter sooner or later. (Matt. v. 4; Isa. lvii. 18; Jer. xxxi. 18-20.)

2. No case of suffering in this world is so extreme, as to have no comforts left. Gideon lost much by the avalanche of ruffianism, that rolled in upon him from the desert, but still he has some wheat left to thresh, and still has provision enough to set before a distinguished stranger. If temporal things were all swept away together, God is still left, which really means that all is yet safe (Ps. xvi. 5, 6; Hab. iii. 18). Elijah was for three years without house or home, without friends or money, and yet God kept him. Many can still sing, "The Lord is my Shepherd—I shall not want." Look at the ravens (Matt. vi. 26). What myriads of sea-fowl are seen on the wing amid the inhospitable climate of the Arctic regions! Where do they all find food among perpetual snows, fields of ice, and frost-bound land?

3. All practical difficulties in Providence should be carried to God for solution. Gideon would end all his soliloquies by committing the whole case to God in prayer. "Hezekiah spread out the letter before the Lord" (2 Kings xix. 14). "Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the Lord" (2 Chr. xx. 4).

4. Privations of earthly comforts are no loss in the end to God's true children. But to want spiritual blessings is a dead loss, which nothing can ever compensate (1 Tim. vi. 7, 8; Ps. xxxvii. 37, 38; Prov. xiv. 32). Hence the wisdom of Matt. vi. 33.

5. God's presence is the beginning of all true joy. The Angel-Jehovah's presence was really the presence of God, which implies the presence of all peace, all power and protection, and all blessing of every name, but only to God's children. All can sing—

> "God is the treasure of my soul,
> The source of lasting joy,
> A joy which want shall not impair,
> Nor death itself destroy."

(Ps. iv. 6, 7; xvi. 11; xvii. 15; John xvii. 24; xiv. 23, also Isa. xli. 10; xliii. 2).

6. A true-hearted Christian feels for the whole brotherhood, as well as himself This is the spirit of all Gideon's utterances to the angel.

7. The best of men sometimes grievously misinterpret God's Providences. Gideon's logic was just the reverse of what it should have been. Our tears often blind our judgment.

8. Correction for sin is a sure sign that God has not left us. He wishes to save us from the precipice. He would destroy the cancerous root while it is yet time. "He that spareth the rod hateth the child, but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." "You only have I known, ... therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities" (Prov. xiii. 24; Amos iii. 2; also Heb. xii. 6-8). "Sins, not afflictions, prove God's absence."

9. Sometimes the best of men pass through the world unknown. "He was in the world—and the world knew him not"—though it may have benefitted much by his prayers, and Christian influence in a small circle (John i. 10, 26). The martyrs were unknown—

> "'Till persecution dragged them into fame,
> And chased them up to heaven."

Such a man as Gideon would have remained unknown, had not that God, who seeth not as man seeth, brought him to light. He was not likely to come to the front himself, filled as he was with humility; and he was little appreciated by those around him.

10. Despondency is always unworthy of a true Christian. His true motto is—"I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" It is only a weak faith that desponds. "All the promises of God are yea and amen through Christ." What a fund of strength!

11. It is highly important to see that we have a firm foundation to our faith. This was really what Gideon wished to be at, and his request was granted.

CHAPTER VI.—*Verses* 24–32.

THE REMOVAL OF THE BARRIER TO DELIVERANCE.

CRITICAL NOTES.—One thing must be scrupulously gone about, ere a step can be taken to secure the much-needed emancipation of the land. The deliverance itself it would be easy for God to accomplish, were the barrier that prevented it taken out of the way. To remove that barrier out of the way, was, in God's sight, the great thing to be done. Baal stood where Jehovah alone should stand. That which brought all this misery on Israel, was their preferring to have other gods in place of Jehovah. The first thing to be done, in order to restore peace and comfort to the land, was to clear away all other gods, and make Jehovah supreme. Gideon's first duty then, as the champion chosen to save Israel, was to deal a deadly blow against Baal. It is at this point where the directions in this paragraph come in.

25. The same night. the Lord said unto him, etc.] said either by *vision* or *dream* (Gen. xx. 3; xv. 4, 5; xxvi. 24; xxviii. 12-15; Num. xii. 6; 2 Sam. vii. 4; 1 Kings iii. 5; Job iv. 13). It was the night following the day of the angel's visit; while Gideon's heart was still all aglow with many mixed feelings of wonder, love, and praise, and, while a strange conflict of thoughts was passing through his mind about the very responsible though noble position, which he had just been called by the Angel Jehovah to occupy—it was then he was called upon to take the first step. Delay. in such a case, would beget irresolution. Besides, on general grounds, there was no time to be lost. Now that the people had repented, and sent up a cry all over the land, it was fit that God's tender mercy should show itself. Let not a tear too many be shed. Bring the axe and cut down the idol. Let an altar to Jehovah rise in its stead. The idol of the district—that which stood within the grounds of Joash, and which served as the point of worship to all the Abi-ezrites, is taken as a symbol to represent all the other images of Baal throughout the land.

This was in keeping with the fact that Gideon was now a public character, chosen of God to represent the whole people of Israel, so that what was done by him was understood to be done in the name of the whole people. When he cut down the Asherah, and destroyed the altar on his father's grounds, much more was done than merely the demolishing of the idol worshipped by the Abi-ezrites. Being done by him who was now Divinely appointed as mediator between God and all Israel, it must be taken as a blow given to the idolatry of the whole land. The first step in the work of salvation was to abolish idolatry, and what Gideon, the natural leader, now did was to be understood as striking the key-note to be followed by the whole kingdom. His act in erecting an altar to the Lord, in a place different from that chosen for permanent worship, and offering a sacrifice thereon, though highly irregular, judged by the ordinary rule (Deut. xii. 13, 14; Num. xviii. 7; Heb. v. 4), was entirely justifiable on this occasion, first, because it was a Divine command that he was fulfilling (v. 25, 26), and next, because it was a necessary part of the special office for which he was chosen—viz., to be a saviour to Israel. To make an atonement for the sins of the people by a sacrifice of burnt offering, was indeed the most essential part of all that was required of Gideon to do, as the saviour of his people. In it Gideon was virtually acting as the high priest of Israel.

Take thy father's young bullock.] Rather, *ox-bullock* פַּר *i.e.*, a bullock for sacrifice (comp Hos. xiv. 3)—"*we will render as bullocks our lips*," *i.e.*, our praises as our *sacrifice* (*Fausset*)

Even the second bullock of seven years old]—not *and* the second bullock, for there were not *two* bullocks. Mention is made of what Gideon was to do with *one* such, but if there had been two, we should certainly have had directions given as to the other also. The phrase, *the second*

bullock, is three times referred to, but no mention is made of any other (vers. 25, 26, 28). But why is a bullock chosen which was seven years old, for the animal was reckoned at its best state when it was three years? This can scarcely be thought wonderful, when we remember the extreme difficulty felt all over the land in getting animals for sacrifice at all. "The Midianites left to Israel neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass." There was no choice. Besides, in the age of seven years, there was a significant pointing to the period of Israel's severe punishment, inflicted for their flagrant sin. The phrase, second bullock may indicate its age as compared with others.

Throw down the altar of Baal which thy father hath]. This altar was usually made of stone, though sometimes of wood or earth (2 Kings xxiii. 15). Being massive, various materials, besides the axe, would be needed to destroy it and the Asherah. He required to wrench the altar of Baal out of its grooves, and throw it down. His duty also required him to erect an altar to Jehovah, and for this he dare not use the polluted and broken fragments of Baal's altar. He must bring fresh stones and earth with him, and as the whole must be done in one night, he required considerable help. Accordingly, he took ten men of his father's servants for this purpose.

Cut down the grove that is by it]—*upon* it. Not "grove" but the Asherah, or wooden pillar, the Canaanite symbol of the moon-goddess, representing nature's passive powers, as Baal, the sun-god represents the active powers. This pillar was placed in upright form on the altar of Baal. In Deut. xvi. 21, it is said to be "planted" on it (הִטָּע) covered with all manner of symbols.

26. Upon the top of this rock]—the top of a fortification, or fortress built as a defence against the Midianites. It would be near to where the altar of Baal had stood—the highest available spot in the district, to make it as conspicuous as possible, and to show that it must be held superior to all other things (Hence Isa. ii. 1, 2). This was reckoned to be honouring to Jehovah. Some think it was on the top of the hill, the highest point at hand, others that it was the castle, or citadel of Ophrah. Baal's altar must first be cast down, then the altar to Jehovah reared.

In the ordered place.] This is an expression of which many interpretations have been given (בַּמַּעֲרָכָה). The best, as it appears to us, is that given by *Keil*, "with the preparation," *i.e.*, which is necessary for presenting the sacrifice. The specific idea is, the *orderly* preparation of every thing about the sacrifice, a circumstance to which God Himself, in all offerings, attached the greatest importance. We might indeed translate the sentence thus:—"Build an altar unto the Lord . . . putting everything in due order," etc. Thus did Abraham (Gen. xxii. 9). Thus too did Elijah (1 Kings xviii. 33). The word עָרַךְ is often used to express the idea of setting sacred things in order, connected with the worship of God (Ex. xxxix. 37; Lev. i. 7; xxiv. 3, 4, 6). But this orderly preparation for the sacrifice did not refer to his using the materials got from the breaking down of Baal's altar, for building up the altar of Jehovah. [*Speaker's Com.*] The case quoted in confirmation of this view is not in point, viz.: 1 Kings xv. 22, for in that transaction there was nothing sacred, whereas the sacred character of the erection here was the all-important point. The materials of Baal's altar must be held to be polluted; Gideon therefore must build with new materials wherever he can find them. The wood of the Asherah, however, might be used as fuel for the sacrifice, implying that it would be consumed. Hence—

With the wood of the grove *(Asherah)* which thou shalt cut down], *i.e.*, the pieces or blocks of wood got from cutting down the Asherah. That such a command as this should have been given at all, was entirely owing to the exceptional circumstances of the national history, which required a provisional arrangement to meet the emergency. A case very similar occurred in Elijah's days (1 Kings xviii. 18-41).

27. Took ten men.] The number required to form a Church, or to perform publicly any religious service *i.e.*, in name of the Church. Every part of altar service required to be gone through in a very methodical manner. Being now the only son left in the family, and being high in his father's esteem, as well as his affection, he had probably delegated to him such a measure of authority over the servants, as would secure their obedience to his orders on this occasion. His own excellent qualities of character, must also have gained for him an ascendency over several of the domestics, as David did at the court of Saul (1 Sam. xviii. 14-16). But Gideon, when calling the domestics to such a work, must also have brought forward the far more powerful consideration, that an angel had appeared to him, and given him a commission to deliver Israel from the awful scourge that desolated the land, and that the removal of Baal's altar was a necessary preliminary to anything being done. Yet with all these arguments to encourage them, it speaks well for these ten men, that they had the boldness to do as Gideon directed them, even if we add the fact, that he would doubtless assure them, that he would take all the responsibility of the iconoclastic deed on himself.

He feared his father's household, and the men of the city.] This shows what the atmosphere of Joash's house was, strongly savouring of idolatry. The household must have been large, for after deducting the ten men, Gideon still "feared his father's household." We may suppose the ten men to be a fractional part of the entire number, and that, with the exception of that fractional part, the entire number were "wholly given to idolatry," otherwise, why should he fear them? "The men of the city," were probably the old Canaanites who still lingered in the townships of Manasseh, and who were naturally special patrons of Baal worship (ch. ix. 28).

He did it by night!—not that he was afraid of doing the work itself, for he knew well that whether done by day or night, it was sure to be known that *he* did it; but he feared the tumult that would be raised about the doing of it, if he did it in daylight, with all eyes upon him. He felt that there must be an uprising against his doing it at all.

28. And the grove was cut down that was by it!—*upon* it. The *Asherah (wooden pillar) was cut down.* The second bullock was offered on the altar that was built (to Jehovah).] The wood of the Asherah had been used for the burnt-offering, and traces were still remaining. The altar of Jehovah then, must have been built near the site of the altar of Baal.

29. They said Gideon, the son of Joash, hath done this thing.] Informers are always forthcoming, and Gideon was a man so pronounced for Jehovah, that he could not be hid. From his past proclivities, many would suspect him. It is a noble thing for a man so to live, that he shall be suspected by his fellows, of doing some great thing for the glory of the Eternal God. Some also of the ten men would inform others, that it was Gideon, to save themselves.

30. Bring out thy son that he may die.] It is not certain whether Joash was the *owner* of the altar of Baal, or merely its *custodier*, in name of the district over which he ruled. Some think the former from the expression in ver. 25—"the altar of Baal which thy father hath." If so, it shows the extreme intolerance of the Baal party. But the fact that such an outcry should be raised at all in an Israelitish city, shows into what a deplorable stupor the national conscience had sunk, when the rankest possible insult should be publicly offered to Jehovah's name, without a single voice being raised to frown it down. They ask a father to take the life of his son, because that son had dared to stand up for Jehovah's interest, and relegate Baal to oblivion in Jehovah's land!

31. Joash said to all that stood against him.] עליו *before* him, *i.e.*, as chief magistrate. Happily, he the father himself was now fairly aroused, when he saw that the life of he only son left to him was in danger. It is probable, from all the circumstances, that, before this, he had had serious doubts in his own mind, as to the propriety of giving any farther support to idol worship, when he saw the sad results in the destruction of his country. He may possibly indeed have had secret desires to see a general return of the public mind to the worship of Jehovah, and now seizes the present occasion to speak out his mind. All this could be greatly strengthened, by the detail which his son would give him of his wonderful interview with the angel, and the Divine command to throw down the altar of Baal. If he had got this information beforehand, doubtless he must have thought very maturely over the question, what was the best answer to give the idolaters, when his son should be arraigned before him in public. God helped him with the answer which he gave. It was most admirable. It was an unanswerable answer.

"What!" he says, rising to the full height of his position as magistrate, "will *ye* plead for Baal?—*ye*, and not Baal himself? Do *ye* presume to come forward to speak on his behalf, as if he could not speak for himself? He who dares to insinuate that Baal cannot help himself, is putting an indelible stigma on his name, and deserves to die. He is the man who ought to be put to death, and that without delay, while it is yet morning. If Baal be really a god, surely he can defend himself, and now let him do it, since one man has cast down his altar." This is really the spirit of the few but energetic words of the very capable ruler of Ophrah. The clamour was hushed in a moment. It was of God that this reply was given; so He threw His shield around the man of His choice. Yet we may also say, Joash was the right man in the right place. "A word spoken in season, how good is it!"

Not a few Commentators (*Keil, Cassel, Edersheim, Fausset*, and others) would put a full stop at the word "*death*," and read what follows thus, "till (next) morning let Baal, if he be a god, plead for himself, for now surely there is need for it, since one has cast down his altar." The A. V. seems more simple and natural—"he who (thinks Baal cannot plead for himself, and therefore) stands up to plead for him, (is doing him an insult, and) ought to be put to death this very morning. If he be a god, let him plead for himself, since one has overturned his altar."

32. Called him Jerubbaal.] *Let Baal fight with him*, or the man who defies Baal to fight with him, with impunity; as David defied the Philistine. Variations of the name afterwards occur as *Jerubbesheth* (2 Sam. xi. 21), in which *Besheth or Bosheth* (shame) is a nickname of Baal. This variation also occurs in *Ishbosheth* (2 Sam. ii. 8), and in *Eshbaal* (1 Chron. viii. 33; ix. 39).

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 25-32.

I. All genuine obedience is well pleasing to God.

This is the purport of the present paragraph. It speaks of the first test to which Gideon's obedience was put, and how he stood it. The obedience which God requires of all His servants is, that His command alone be taken as sufficient reason for obedience, apart from any other motive, and that it be regarded as sufficient to overrule all other considerations. If a host of difficulties and objections should stand in the way, the obedient servant has but one simple question to ask, Does my God require it?—if so, he has no other thought but to obey. This is what may be called pure obedience, and is synonymous with the description so often given in Scripture, of "the man who fears the Lord." The highest expressions of the Divine regard are made to such a spirit of obedience, as being most glorifying to God, and showing that the creature is nearing the true pivot of his being, which is that of instinctive obedience to the will of his Creator, "He that doeth the will of my Father, the same is my brother, and sister and mother." The whole Book of Deuteronomy is one continued enforcement of the duty of reverential obedience to the commandments, statutes, and judgments of Israel's covenant God. The example of obedience afforded in Gideon's case was most beautiful, on whatever side we look at it.

1. **It was prompt.** There was no hesitation. The command of his God being given, he has no other thought than to obey. That command alone rules him. "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth" was his motto. He has full trust in *his God* without inquiring whether there was a rational prospect of carrying through the work. Thus did Abraham. The command being given, "he rose up early in the morning, saddled his ass. . . and went to the place of which God had told him" (Gen. xxii. 3; xvii. 23; xxi. 14). So did David; "I made haste, and delayed not to keep God's commandments" (Ps. cxix. 60). So did Paul; "When it pleased God to reveal His son in me, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. i. 15, 16). (Matt. iv. 20, 22; ix. 9; Luke xix. 5, 6; John i. 48, 49).

2. **It was done under great difficulties.** He had no sympathy from any around him. His very father, so loving in other matters, he believed, in this case, would only give his frowns, or, at the very best, must withhold his good wishes, being virtually the priest of Baal himself. Even though Gideon might acquaint him with the Divine commission, it could only lead the father to try his best to save his son, but not to assist him in the work. The ten men whom he employed as assistants would, doubtless, also raise many objections, and need strong arguments to induce them to give their aid, and the numerous other domestics, Gideon felt he must also regard as strongly opposed to the very idea of offering such an insult to the deity that had for so many years been worshipped in the district. There was no sympathy at home with the duty he had on hand, and among the population outside there was only an unbroken stream of opposition. Gideon's obedience was boldly done, for it was done in a strongly idolatrous centre, without a single friend to stand by him in the work. Yet he shows no faltering, or fear of man. His act was like that of Luther when he nailed the Theses to the doors of the Cathedral at Wittemberg, or, on that other occasion, when he burned the Papal Bull in the midst of a people who had been under the influence of Popery for many generations.

There are many formidable difficulties ever occurring in the way of religious duty in daily life—difficulties so great that they seem to render the fulfilment of the duty an impossibility. Yet all may be conquered by a strong faith or an ardent love. "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the

sepulchre?" (Mark xvi. 13). Yet an ardent love in Mary's case saw no such difficulty, but, on the contrary, thought that she, a feeble woman, could remove the body itself if she only knew where to find it (John xx. 15). "Who art thou, oh, great mountain before Zerubbabel, thou shalt become a plain?"

3. **It was done at the risk of life.** Gideon understood the temper of his people and the temper of the times. Notwithstanding their terrible calamities, he knew that they were yet in the mass of them, leavened with the idolatrous spirit, and that to tamper with their God was to commit, in their eyes, a capital crime. It was an unpardonable offence, and all the religious frenzy of the district would be aroused to demand his execution. On this he calculated, and yet he quailed not. The fear of God in him was strong enough to overrule all the fear of man. This pass of mental difficulties which he had to go through greatly heightens our admiration of his heroic resolution. He was willing even to lose his life for the sake of his duty to his God (John xii. 25; Matt. xvi. 25). His fidelity to his God could stand the severest test (Luke xiv. 26). All that he counted dear in life, including the love of life itself, he was willing to sacrifice, but he could not disobey his God.

4. **It was done without a murmur.** We hear of no complaints about the severity of the test. Even Moses complained in similar circumstances (Ex. iv. 1, 10, 13). Barak raised objections (ch. iv. 8). But not a murmer comes from the lips of Gideon, when called to do that which was sure to endanger life. He asks no modification of the command. It is all right when his God requires it. Duty is his; to determine results is God's. It was an unquestioning obedience. Doubtless he saw the necessity of it, for sin must be put away ere deliverance could come, and Baal, he well knew, was the root of the evil. But manifestly it was not his own sense of the fulness of what should be done that was his guiding motive throughout this whole transaction. From beginning to end he regarded the whole proceeding as coming from the Lord, and therefore to His instructions on every point implicitly he gave heed. Oh, for more of this high-toned confidence in God, as our own God, which lifts the soul far above both the smiles and the frowns of a world that knows us not!

II. Gideon's support in his obedience.

He might, at first sight, have said, "All things are against me." Yet, on reflection, he might have added, "they that are with me are more than they that are against me." For—

1. **He had a good conscience.** He was sure that God had spoken to him and, therefore, that what he was about, was fulfilling a command he had received from God. He realised the fact, that this was the first and necessary step of a plan of action, which God had marked out for him to do. He felt that he was in the service of God in the whole matter, and that all the steps to be taken were marked out by God, and were not schemes of his own devising. Thus he had all that inward strength which a good conscience always gives. Though, in his father's house, he had no sympathy, in that home of homes, the innermost home of his own heart, all was with him; in the profoundest convictions which he cherished in the sanctuary of his breast, every feeling within was in full support of the action without. The consciousness of righteousness was "the girdle of his loins." When he broke down the altar of Baal, he felt as if at Mahanaim, and that two companies of the angels of God, in two crescents, were acting as his shield. "His heart was established, and he was not afraid; he was not greatly moved" (Ps. cxii. 6, 8; lxii. 5–7; lvii. 1). "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good" (1 Peter iii. 13).

2. He had the assurance of the Divine presence. It was God's work he was doing, and not his own. That alone was enough to foster the belief that he would have the Divine shield thrown over him. For God is a master who "sends none a warfare on their own charges." His language always is, "I will be with thee." It was so now. Gideon was expressly assured that the angel Jehovah had not only sent him (ch. vi. 14), but also that He would Himself be with him (v. 16). More than that under no circumstances could be needed. For what were all the men of Abi-ezer, or all the hordes of the ruthless invaders, in comparison of the mighty God of Jacob? Gideon felt like David—"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear what man can do unto me. Though the people compass me about as bees, they shall be quenched as the fire of thorns, for in the name of the Lord, I will destroy them." "If God be for us, who can be against us?" It is because we do not realise how much is included in that —"I will be with thee"—that we get fainthearted and irresolute, in the day of trial. There is a great art in knowing how, when weak in ourselves, to become "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

3. He was sustained by the assurance of success in his great enterprise. He felt it was no doubtful project in which he was engaged, when the hand of God was at the helm. It was a scheme in which God's own glory was concerned, and now that he was raised up out of His place, Gideon felt convinced that having begun the work, He could accomplish it to the end. And so glorious a consummation it would be, to see Israel entirely free from the heavy incubus, that had crushed all the energy out of the nation these seven years, that this eminently successful God-fearing and patriotic man was willing to sacrifice all his personal feelings and interests in order to its attainment. He had no doubtbegun his duties by arming himself with earnest prayer, that God would no longer "deliver the soul of His turtle-dove unto the multitude of the wicked—that He would remember the congregation He had purchased of old—that He would not remember against them past iniquities, for they were brought very low—that He would turn again their captivity as streams in the south—that the Lord would comfort Zion—that He would comfort all her waste places, making her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord."

4. He had had long gathering thoughts of revenge against Baal. Many strong purposes have their roots deep in the soil of past experiences. Gideon was one of those who had discerned where the true source of all Israel's misery lay. And long had he mused how the idols could be abolished. Those musings would lead to a deep purpose of revenge against Baal, so soon as an opportunity occurred. It was the thought of many years, matured and strengthened by the ever fresh calamities which occurred at every new visit of the enemy. When at length the call was made in Providence, "Who is the man that shall fight against Baal, and destroy his power throughout Israel?" Gideon replied in his heart—"Here am I, send me!" God knew the state of Gideon's heart, and therefore selected him as a sort of agent for doing His work.

The General Lessons Taught.

1. Religious duty ought to begin at home. When Christ taught His disciples where to commence their great work of preaching the gospel, He said "Begin at Jerusalem." Begin where you are—at home. All souls are precious alike. Therefore begin at the point nearest you. This, at least, was one reason for doing so. Abraham began at home, and as a matter of fact almost every domestic he had, of whom we hear any account was a fearer of his God (Gen. xviii. 19). Jacob when about to draw closer to God, and to have new manifestations of the Divine love, begins with making a strict religious reforma-

tion in his own household. He required, that all his household should "put away the strange gods that were among them" (Gen. xxxv. 2, 3). And now Gideon is required to begin at his father's house the important duty, of cleansing their hands and purifying their hearts. The church-office-bearer is required, before entering on his duties in superintending the spiritual well-being of the church, to "rule well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim. iii. 4, 5).

2. **Obstacles to religious duty are sometimes found amid the tenderest relations of life.** It is singular that Gideon should have had so little sympathy, and have been even exposed to so much danger, in his own father's house, for doing his duty to his God. That father was the most influential man in the district, and Gideon was now his only son. That son had a singular combination of good qualities of character, fit to call forth the respect and even the love of all the domestics. Moreover, the work which he was now doing was given him by the God of Israel to do, and it was notorious to all who had eyes to read the signs of the times, that the overwhelming distresses under which the land groaned, were owing to the apostasy of the people from the God, whom they were so deeply pledged to love and serve. Yet it required the greatest heroism on Gideon's part to fulfil an obviously necessary duty, and one which was divinely commanded, having to run the greatest risk of losing his life. So true is it, that for the sake of fidelity to religious principle, "a man's foes will sometimes be those of his own household."

Even Abraham had to contend with an idolatrous opposition in his father's house, before he left the paternal home. His father and brothers, with probably the whole family circle, at first "served other gods." This must have led to family differences, if, as we must suppose, Abraham was even then a devoted worshipper of the true God. At length the family circle broke up, God directing Abraham to leave his earthly friends, however dear, and promising, probably as a reward for his fidelity in being found "faithful among the faithless," to bless him and make of him a great nation. With Abraham there went Sarai his wife, his father Terah, and his nephew Lot. The rest appear to have remained where they were, and we hear no more of them (Josh. xxiv. 2, 3; Gen. xi. 27-32; xii. 1-3). Jacob had much difficulty in performing his duties to his God while living in the same family circle with an ungodly brother, though it must not be overlooked, that he himself greatly increased the difficulty by some grievous faults of his own (Gen. xxvii). The same difficulty followed him to Padan-aram, in the house of the old miser, where he passed more than twenty years (Gen. xxxi.). We have a similar example in the case of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who, as members of the Levitical* tribe, ought to have succoured Moses and Aaron in every possible way, in the discharge of their onerous sanctuary and other duties, and yet raised a determined opposition to them, while only fulfilling the trust which God had committed to them (Num. xvi). David was often in such difficulties. (1 Sam. xvii. 28, 29; Ps. xli. 9; 1 Sam. xxx. 3-6; 2 Sam. xvi. 11); Job also (Job. xix. 13-19); and Jeremiah (Jer. xii. 6; xx. 10, 11); in the days of Micah there was much of it (Micah vii. 6); and the Master Himself leads His disciples to expect it (Matt. x. 21, 22, 34-37; Luke xii. 49, 51-53).

3. **Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.** This truth is taught broadly in that Epistle, which professes to interpret the Divine meaning of the whole sacrificial system (Heb. ix. 22). We find the great truth illus-

* Properly speaking, Korah only belonged to the tribe of Levi, while Dathan and Abiram were of the tribe of Reuben. But Korah manifestly took the lead in the movement, so that the remarks made above are substantially correct.

trated in Abel's days, who brought an animal for sacrifice as his offering to God, in contrast to Cain's offering, which was merely of the fruit of the ground, and therefore showed no thought of a propitiation for his sins (Gen. iv. 3–5). Noah offered sacrifices of blood on his altar, "and the Lord smelled a sweet savour." (Gen. viii. 20, 21). Abram reared the altar regularly, wherever he went (Gen. xii. 8; xiii. 4; do. 18, etc.). Also Jacob did the same (Gen. xxxi 54; xxxv. 3). Moses by God's direction laid down the whole system of sacrifice, which was to be sacredly observed by all God's people down through their history, till the coming of the true Lamb of God, who was for ever to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

As part of this system, we here find Gideon, by God's special direction, building an altar to God, and on it, shedding blood, as a symbol of that which was needed to atone for the people's sins. Only thus could God righteously pardon sin. Sin forfeits the life of the sinner (Rom. vi. 23; Gen. ii. 17; Ezek. xviii. 4, 20). But the blood is the life; therefore to shed the blood is to give to sin its wages. This must be done because it is God's law. It is both just and true —it preserves God's character as a God of truth. Hence the sinner must die, or a suitable substitute be found for him (Rom. iii. 25, 26; 2 Cor. v. 21; Rom. viii. 3, 4; Eph. v. 2; Col. i. 20; Heb. *passim*).

4. **God greatly honours faithfulness in a declining time.** Fidelity to God's name and cause, is always a spectacle well pleasing unto God. But when it takes the form of stedfast endurance under sharp sufferings, in the face of stern opposition, without any friendly help, and at serious personal loss, it rises a hundredfold higher in the estimation of Him toward whom it is shown. And a hundredfold greater will be the reward (Matt. xix. 27-29). The Master will see to it, that no servant be a loser for his fidelity to Him. Hence the greatness of the reward (Matt. vii. 12). The reward is an hundredfold even in this life (Mark x. 30). And in Paul's history we see it exemplified in the extraordinary outpouring of the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, when under the greatest sufferings connected with the carrying on of his great work (Act xiii. 52; xviii. 9, 20; xxi. 13; 2 Cor. i. 4, 5; ii. 14).

Thus it was with Gideon, while passing through his difficult work, doing it so well, and doing it without a murmur, though Satan stirred up opposition to him on all hands. He whom he served looked on with supreme satisfaction, gave him all needed strength to persevere till it was accomplished, gave him complete success in the result, and prepared for him a great reward in the future. For, conspicuous as a star of the first magnitude, shines the name of Gideon, in the Orion nebula of the New Testament heavens (Heb. xi. 32). Gideon, by his fidelity, was now making history, one of the brightest pages, where there are so many bright. He was the iron cable that would not break, but kept sure and stedfast, when so many others were snapping asunder at the pitching and heeling of the vessel, as the waves were carrying it right on the rocks. Such a man deserves to be esteemed through all time; and there never, we believe, will come a time, even in the bright ages of New Testament history, when such a man need be ashamed to show his face. Already he has a place among the fixed stars of the Church's sky. And this motto may be written under his name:— "Blessed is the man that endureth trial, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him" (James i. 12).

5. **God has all hearts in His hand, and all events at His disposal.** However hopeless the web of difficulties with which God's servant in this matter was surrounded, the great Ruler of Providence found ways and means of extricating him from danger, without any miraculous interposition. We are not to forget

that God exercises complete control over the workings of every man's mind, every moment of his life, and leads him to form this or that impression, this or that purpose, this or that idea, without in the least interfering with the full measure of liberty which belongs to him, as a rational and voluntary agent. It was not in any way, a doing violence to the law of the mind's free agency, if God should (as we believe He did) turn the minds of Joash's household to think thus on this occasion. "Well! there is little doubt that the worship of Baal is at the bottom of our great misery, and if it should be reckoned by these old Canaanites, such a terrible affront to their god to do as Gideon has done, still it will be a great step to our much needed relief, and since it has been done, let it so remain, for we cannot lay a hand on the noble young man who is the pride of the family, and himself all but the idol of the district. No, we will rally round him, if any hostile hand should be raised. "To think thus would be not unnatural—and yet it would be all of God's over-ruling.

CHAPTER VI.—*Verses* 33–40.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONFLICT.

Critical Notes.—33. Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites.] As to the Amalekites, see ver. 3, and ch. iii. 13. God puts a special brand on the name of Amalek. He would "blot out the remembrance of that people from under heaven" (Ex. xvii. 14, 16). They were in the line of Esau, and carried down through all their generations, a spirit of bitter and relentless malevolence, such as the elder brother at first cherished for the younger. They were the first heathen nation to make war on the kingdom of God. (So some read Num. xxiv. 20). Their fight with Israel at Rephidim was malicious. They had no reason for it, but bitter hatred. They strove to prevent God's own people from partaking of the sacred blessing of water, from the smitten rock. They also cruelly slaughtered the sick and feeble, or the women and children, who were in the rear of the camp (Deut. xxv. 17-19). They joined with the Canaanites in smiting Israel at Hormah (Num. xiv. 45). They fought against Israel along with Eglon, king of Moab (ch. iii. 13). Now they did the same with the Midianites. They invaded the South and smote Ziklag in David's time (1 Sam. xxx.). And they seem to have had wars with the tribe of Simeon in the days of Hezekiah (1 Chron. iv. 43-45). It is a dangerous thing to hate those whom God loves.

Valley of Jezreel.] Some read *plain* of Jezreel, for a large portion of it was level ground. But the Hebrew word (עֵמֶק) signifies *deep place*, or valley. A small portion of the ground was really a valley, but for the most part it was a plain, and in later times has been generally known as the great plain of Esdraelon, which is indeed the Greek form of the name. This plain is from fifteen to twenty miles long, and about twelve miles broad from north to south. Though not exactly the basin of an amphitheatre, it has hills around it, nearer or more remote, on every side. It stretches the larger part of the way, from the Mediterranean Sea above Carmel, to the valley of the Jordan. On the south are Mount Carmel, the mountain land of Ephraim and the range of hills connecting the two, on the north are the mountains of Galilee, on the west, the southern spurs of the Galilean highland, and on the east, the mountains of Gilboa, and Little Hermon. The soil is extremely rich, and, though less than fifteen miles square, was, at one time, capable of supporting a population of over 100,000 persons. In the spring season, the whole plain presented the appearance of a vast waving corn field, interspersed with olive trees, which seemed a charming contrast to the huge bare masses of hills that bound it on either side. The three portions of the district most spoken of were the valley of Jezreel, the corn fields of Issachar (this principally) and the slopes of the Manasseh hills. It was the great "battle field of Palestine;" from Barak to Bonaparte. Here Sisera's host were annihilated, the Midianites were dreadfully slaughtered, Saul and Jonathan fell at Mount Gilboa, thrilling and melancholy scenes in the lives of Ahab and Jezebel, Jehu and Joram, occurred, King Josiah fought with Necho at Megiddo and was slain, the tragic scene of Holofernes and Judith took place, battles were fought by the Roman General Vespasian, also by Saladin the Great and the Knights Templar, Bonaparte and Kleber, and we might have included, by the famous Egyptian conquerors, Thothmes III. and Rameses II., better known as Sesostris, who invaded Syria by this route. Warriors of every race within a wide range, have here fought, Jews, Gentiles, Egyptians, Saracens, Christian Crusaders and Anti-Christian Frenchmen, Persians, Druses, Turks and Arabs. Here Elijah ran before Ahab's chariot into Jezreel, and here the tragedy occurred of seizing the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, by the cold-blooded murder of the owner. It presents some of the loveliest and most picturesque scenes of nature, but some of the darkest scenes of human history

Pitched in the valley]—encamped, or bivouacked. This was now the eighth annual visit of the kind they had paid to this, the garden of Israel. The moral significance of this visit was, not only that it was the last, but that while the enemy had no other thought than that of plunder and feasting, at the expense of God's people as before, God was now really bringing them forward for a signal destruction, because of their daring to touch His anointed ones, in like manner as He drew Sisera and his army to the very same ground, to deliver them into the hand of Barak (ch. iv. 7).

34. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.] As on Othniel, and afterwards on Jephthah, and on Samson (see pp. 97, 146-9, 150-158). We have an expression nearly parallel, when describing the outpouring of the same Spirit on the disciples—"tarry in Jerusalem till ye be endued with power from on high"—all the elements of moral and spiritual power, as explained on the pages referred to. The Hebrew word (לָבְשָׁה) means, literally, *to clothe with*. Gideon was clothed with the Spirit, or was enveloped with it, wrapped all round. It is the same also with the more simple expression, "filled with the Spirit" (1 Chron. xii. 18; 2 Chron. xxiv. 20). Gideon had now a baptism of the Holy Ghost. Greater honour no man on earth could possibly attain to than this. All the crowns in the world were but a trifle of honour compared to this. This distinction would not evaporate in time, but would go with him where he went into any department in the world of spirits.

Blew a trumpet]—to convoke an army of volunteers. Abi-ezer, including his father's house, and the *clan*, gathered to him. The clan was an expansion of the family, through several generations, something like "the genealogical tree." It might include hundreds or thousands, as the case might be. אַחֲרָיו *after or behind him, i.e.*, as their leader. Though not a king or a king's son, though not chosen by public vote, and though the least in his father's household, and his family connection was poor in Manasseh, yet he had gained their confidence all at once so much, that over 30,000 men were ready to follow him to the field. This surely was the finger of God. The exact translation of the phrase about Abi-ezer is, *Abi-ezer let itself be summoned after him* (*Keil*). As if it felt that a Divine call to follow Gideon was in the air, and notwithstanding all its idolatrous proclivities, it made no resistance to the heavenly voice.

35 Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali.] Only Western Manasseh is referred to—the cis-jordanic part. Asher was behind on a former occasion (ch. v. 17), lingering among its ships, in the bays and creeks of a good mercantile coast, afraid to lose its commerce with the Phœnicians, who formed a great part of Sisera's army. But now it is among the first to join the ranks of Gideon. The other two northern tribes well sustain their high reputation for zeal in the cause of their God—Zebulun and Naphtali (ch. v. 18). Nor are they forgotten. When many generations have passed away, their country and their names are immortalized by the appearance among them of the great light, which came down from heaven to chase away the shadow of death from the abodes of men (see Matt. iv. 15, 16).

Came up to meet them.] *i.e.*, the Manassites—the nucleus that had gathered around Gideon. But these northern tribes occupied hilly regions. In going to the valley of Jezreel, therefore, they were going *down*, not *up*. The explanation appears to be, that the Hebrew word (עָלָה) means simply, *advanced* to meet them.

36, 37. If thou wilt save Jezreel by my hand, Behold I put a fleece of wool on the ground, etc.] If Thou art saving—intendest to save Israel, etc., I know (by this) that Thou wilt save, etc. הַגֵּז נִדַּת *what is shorn of the wool*. The word occurs here only. Some think this to be too trivial a matter for a miracle, and regard it as unworthy of Scripture. Rather, we think it a clear proof that such an event really happened, that it was in harmony with an uncultured age, but less adapted to the standard of taste in refined, modern times. It was in harmony with the pursuits in which Gideon was engaged, as a tiller of the ground and a dealer in sheep. The "floor referred to was the threshing-floor, or what was used as such, which was open to the sky.

38. Thrust the fleece]—*compressed*, **wringed**]—*squeezed*. That so much dew should have fallen, does not indicate that as much fell on the wool alone, as would have fallen on the whole ground in the ordinary natural way. But it showed that the dew fell as copiously on the fleece, as was the custom in that climate of heavy dew-fall, while the ground on both sides near it was quite dry. The falling of the dew in Palestine is most abundant. Maundrell and his companions tell us, that "their tents, when pitched on Tabor and Hermon, were as wet with dew, as if it had rained on them all night; and others speak of their cloaks in which they wrapt themselves, while they slept, as being completely wet, as if they had been immersed in the sea." (*Eadie.*)

39, 40. Let not thine anger be hot against me.] This statement is important as showing the state of Gideon's mind, that it was most reverential, and glorifying to God. How tender is God

in His dealings with the man that really fears Him like Gideon, or Abraham, or Moses! Where there is a spark of true faith, He is tender in fanning it, till it rise into a flame.

The wool naturally draws the moisture, even when other objects remain dry. Gideon therefore, to make sure in so great a crisis, adds one request more, that what was contrary to the natural law might take place, namely, the fleece might remain dry over night, while all the ground round about it should be wet with dew. And in both instances, it happened as he requested, a sure proof that God was listening to his voice; for none save He who laid down nature's laws could thus control them at will.

GENERAL LESSONS.—*Verses* 33–40.

Divine Encouragement and Human Weakness.

I. The supports of Christ's service far exceed its anxieties.

(1.) *The angel proved true to His word.* "I will be with thee." Before victory came, before the thousands of Israel came around him, before the trumpet blew Gideon's fame, while as yet he was only blowing the trumpet of duty, there came the greatest of all blessings to his heart, comforts flowed in to his soul, his peace of mind passed all understanding, and for strength he felt as if the resources of a hundred thousand men were concentrated in his single person. "The Spirit of the Lord clothed him." No mantle fell, like that of Elijah on Elisha, nor was any high priest's robe of office specially conveyed to him. But the sublime reality, of which that costly habit was but the poor symbol, now comes into his spirit. The Divine Spirit took possession of the human spirit, and his heart rose within him with a new courage, while his face shone as if it had been the face of an angel of God. "His feet were made as hinds' feet," while his "arms were made strong by the mighty God of Jacob." He felt borne as on eagles' wings along the course of duty. He had received a baptism of the Holy Ghost, and now could run and not be weary, walk and not faint. He that could make fire to spring out of the rock to consume the sacrifice, could also fill with fire the heart of the desponding disciple. To the fullest extent did he realise the fulfilment of the promise, "they that trust in Me shall not be ashamed."

(2.) *The sentiment applies generally.* Christ's service always gives more happiness to His faithful servants, than is needed to compensate for its sorrows and sacrifices. Who would not rather be with the Master on the raging deep, assured that every billow is subject to His word, and that no wave can rob Him of any of His redeemed ones, than be loitering indolently in dereliction of duty on the shore? It is better to be with Paul in prison, than to be with the wearer of the imperial purple in the palace. Better have the "thorn in the flesh," however rankling it be, than be without it, and remain ignorant of the sustaining power of Christ's grace. Never were men nearer heaven, while still outside its gates, than were those who could "rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for their Master's name."

To be clothed with the Spirit, is to be clad with it as the sky is covered with clouds, or the earth with glory, when the meridian sun shines upon it. Or, we might speak of it as a body covered with a coat of mail, making a man at once invulnerable and invincible."

II. Divine Providence co-operates with human fidelity.

We have seen how Gideon was brought through his first great trial of duty, by God inclining first the heart of Joash, his father, then of the men who had helped him, then of all the household, and finally overawing the men of the city—the old Canaanites, who would dwell among the Israelites to the last. Now we find the circle getting wider and wider. For all would soon hear of the visit of the angel-Jehovah to Gideon, that He had announced the time of relief from oppression to be at hand,

that He had appointed Gideon to be the leader of Israel, and that all this was confirmed by the working of a miracle. A Divine command had also been given to Gideon to break down the altar of Baal, and erect an altar to Jehovah in its stead, which Gideon had done, and no harm came of it. Baal was thereby proved to have no power to defend himself, and was not a true god. A conviction was rising among the people, that all their misery was owing to their worship of Baal and the displacement of Jehovah. The thought, therefore, was now getting up, of making a general return to Jehovah, and the deserted spouse was now saying, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now." Gideon had done well to get his father to become his first convert. His influence would go far to determine others, and when a few decisions were obtained, it would be easy among such a people to multiply them. Thus would Abi-ezer be obtained, by the use of natural means, and yet by the controlling influence of Divine Providence. But when the Spirit of God came on Gideon, a mighty impulse was given to the movement. Everywhere this mighty man of valour instilled his own spirit into all his followers, and a general stirring up took place. "The weak became as David, and David as the Angel of the Lord." All received life as from the dead; the trumpet sound was the sound of a jubilee morning; emancipation was coming; the recovery of the land, and the breaking of the yoke. An electric thrill passed through all hearts, and many were disposed at once to come forward "to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

III. The memories of the trumpet-call.

"In all ages, the call of the trumpet has been associated with the clang of arms, the evolutions of troops, and the "pomp and circumstance of war." Often has it aroused the slumbering energies of patriotism, rallied the courage of those who have conducted the attack, and animated the resolution of those who have stood on the defence. Its heart-piercing language has been understood alike on the walls of Troy, at the gates of Rome, among the hosts of the Crusaders, and on the fields of Waterloo and Inkermann.

"But to the Israelite, the sound of the trumpet was associated not more with war than with religion. When the fathers were journeying through the wilderness, the sound of the silver trumpets blown by the priests, was the signal for their marches and for their convocations. The advent of the new year was celebrated by the feast of trumpets, also days of gladness, solemn days, and the beginnings of months. The majesty of the law was attested by the voice of the trumpet, the walls of Jericho fell flat, when on the seventh day the trumpets of rams' horn were blown by the priests, and the Midianites themselves when, two centuries before, they had troubled Israel, had been dispersed at the sound of the trumpet (Num. xxxi. 6).

"For years the trumpet had been silent in Israel. God's ordinances and His Sabbaths had been disregarded, the memories of Sinai and of Jericho had slumbered, the orgies of Baal had ursurped the place of the holy convocations, and now that its sound was once more heard, it spoke to the people of Him whose covenant they had long forgotten, but whom at last they had invoked in their anguish."—(*Wiseman.*)

IV. Misapprehension in judging the Character of others.

Not a few express surprise that Gideon should have thought of asking any further evidence of God's presence and blessing in this enterprise, and speak of it to the disparagement of his faith. Had he not, it is said, got the assurance of of the angel, "I will be with thee?" Had he not successfully destroyed idol-worship in his father's house, and had he not secured the confidence of the

people, so that they came flocking to him in thousands? What further need was there of miracles, to attest that God was really about to deliver the Midianites into His hands? Thus Gideon is judged, and thus thousands of excellent men are judged, not indeed harshly, but inconsiderately. How much more tender is the judgment of our God! No reproof comes from Him for asking a double miracle to be wrought in this hour of trial, but, on the contrary, an immediate compliance is vouchsafed to the request made.

Gideon would indeed have *been more than human if he had had no doubts at such a moment.* What a responsibility lay on his shoulders! The whole interests of the Church of God at this perilous crisis were in his hands. The very life of the nation was at stake. Everything was to rise or sink according to his success or his failure. Besides, the situation was to him entirely new. He had no experience what it was to be a general at the head of an army. He had no disciplined troops, but raw levies, indifferently equipped, and without trusted officers to lead them. Was it strange, if, notwithstanding many encouragements, he had still some misgivings? But his weakness was that of *nature*, rather than of *faith*; it was *physical*, rather than *moral*. For a moment his mind sunk under the strain of strong events to which it was unaccustomed, and he felt himself weak as a child in holding the reins when such mighty forces had to be controlled. It was the mind's natural inability, through sheer agitation, to look calmly at the evidence set before it, on which faith should be exercised. *Luther*, felt this weakness, as one may see by reading the broken, rugged utterances of his soul, at some of the critical passes of his history, when all alone with his God. *Knox* did, *Augustine* did, and doubtless many others did, if only we could get behind the scenes and witness the severe soul struggles, through which the men of faith had to pass when girding themselves for the decisive conflicts of life. Then the good man prostrates himself in weakness before the Divine footstool. He feels himself a mere straw in existence! a broken reed! weak as a dry leaf in the grasp of the whirlwind! This is a necessary part of the training of those whom God sends out to fight His battles. Each and all must be led to say in deep sincerity of heart, "I will go in strength of God the Lord; I will make mention of thy righteousness, of thine only."

Moses felt thus when the terrible apostacy of the golden calf occurred. The solemn and stern events, which followed each other in swift succession at that period, proved too much for the infirmity of a human nature, and he cried out in earnest prayer, "O Lord! I beseech thee, show me thy glory!" He wished to have a glimpse of the light of God's countenance to calm down his extreme agitation when painful emotions were rolling like mountain billows through his soul. O what help there is in that countenance! Even the Saviour himself, all perfect and sinless, and incapable, under any circumstances, of being lacking in faith, yet being a true and proper man, showed the weakness of a human nature when, under the awful pressure that rested on His human spirit in the place of His sorrows, He cried out earnestly, "O, my Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" "And there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening Him!"

It might be near the mark to add that *Gideon did not for a moment question God's power to save Israel, but in the whirl of his thoughts, he had doubts as to whether he rightly understood God's intentions in using him as an instrument.* His request seemed to be, "Am I really right in my interpretation of God's meaning, that He intends to save Israel from these Midianites, through my poor instrumentality? Does He really intend to employ one that is confessedly so weak and worthless to accomplish so mighty a work?

The Dew on the Fleece—Its Lessons.

The proposal that the dew of heaven should fall on the fleece only, while the ground remained dry during one night, and that exactly the reverse should occur the succeeding night, was one which Gideon himself made, and, as such, it might have little or no significance. But *God accepted it, and, as endorsed by Him,* we are warranted in regarding it as conveying important instruction. More especially may we so regard it, as it was so common in that age to convey moral and spiritual instruction through the medium of signs.

Nor can we overlook the fact, that this miracle was *wrought in the interest of God's church,* and, therefore, the instruction it conveys must have a reference to that church—to its prosperity or decay, for this was the matter in hand. That a fertile imagination could find many meanings wrapped up in this sign is what might be expected, and there is need of caution not to put meanings of our own into that which is employed as a vehicle of instruction by God. We put aside, therefore, all meanings of mere allegorising ingenuity, such as the favourite theory of the old Fathers, that here we have an illustration of the Incarnation in the descent of the heavenly dew into the fleece; and even that other theory, which applies the sign to God's dealings with the Israelitish nation, in contrast with His treatment of the outlying Gentile world. True, in the early ages, Israel was for a long period filled with the dew of heavenly blessings, while the heathen nations around were left in the condition of a moral wilderness, dry and barren of all good. Now this state of things is reversed—many Gentile lands being visited with the dew of quickening and saving grace, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, while the highly-favoured land in which Jehovah once dwelt has long been spiritually "as a salt land not inhabited." This sign does, indeed, fitly emblematise the past and present condition of Israel in relation to the nations around them. But *a mere likeness does not amount to a type.* A type is a designed resemblance, and it is going too much away from the subject in hand to suppose that here there is introduced a designed resemblance of the Israelitish nation in its relation to the outlying world during its long history of thousands of years. Or, if we admit the general principle, we must apply that principle, in the present case, to Gideon's age in its direct bearing.

Before this apostacy, Israel had, in the good times of Deborah, when the nation had anew "lamented after the Lord," been favoured with the descent of heavenly blessings on the land in copious measure, while the nations all around were without any participation of the fructifying shower; and now things are reversed. Israel's fields are left dreary and desolate, while other vineyards are covered with blossom and teeming with fruit. Thus, indeed, the passage might be understood to apply in one sense.

But a more important meaning is, to view Israel not so much as one of the nations, as being *the Church of God at that time on the earth,* and to regard it as represented by the fleece of wool, while the dry ground represents the world as heathen, and so the spiritual meaning of the passage may be expressed by three ideas.

I. The one needful Blessing of a languishing Church is the Heavenly Dew. The dew is referred to, as if all Israel's needs were summed up in that one item. For a large part of the year, the dew-fall was all in all to Israelitish soil. Hence its regular descent was looked upon as an expression of the favour of heaven. But for a copious fall of dew over night, during the hot season, every tree would wither—every plant, shrub, and flower; indeed, the whole vegetable world would die. Hence Isaac's blessing—"God give thee of the dew of heaven;" and Job's acknowledgment—"His dew lay all night on my branch." That, of

which the natural dew is the emblem, is the Divine Spirit's influences coming down on the Christian Church; and the aspects of the blessing are manifold, such as—

1. *Freshness.* Under the heat of a scorching sun, the natural world becomes blanched and withered in appearance. But the dew falls copiously, and the sickly, languishing, vegetable world looks cheerful, and smiles again. The face of nature sparkles with delight. Each flower-cup, and leaf, and heather-bell, partakes of the general joy. Every spire of grass shoots up its little head as if in gratitude for the grateful boon of heaven. All nature is in tears, but it is tears of joy which are shed; for a new glow of life is felt at the heart, and the pulse beats with fresh vigour in the veins. Nature revives, and looks green again. The seed springs in the soil, rich pasture covers the fields, "the valleys are filled with corn, they shout for joy, they also sing."

When the Spirit's influences are poured out, our souls become "like a watered garden and as a field which the Lord hath blessed" There is more fervour of zeal, more ardour of love, more firmness of resolution, and greater energy of action. There is enlargement of heart, and quickening of step in running the race set before us. A deeper hue is given to personal piety, and soul prosperity is advanced. There is more prayer and closer watching for God. Faith is stronger, hope is brighter, humility is deeper, joy is more full, and heavenly-mindedness is more confirmed. How refreshing to a drooping church is the falling of the heavenly dew!

2. *Tenderness* is another aspect of the blessing. "I will be as the dew unto Israel, and he shall grow as the lily." The lily was a flower of extreme delicacy of leaf and flower, and so very tender. It was not robust as the thorn, nor hard as the oak, nor tall as the cedar; it was simply a modest unpretending flower, all the more attractive because of its lowliness and tenderness. A picture of it we have in Mary weeping at the sepulchre. Weak faith, weaker knowledge, but love strong as ever. "They have taken away *my Lord*"—still *mine*, even in death. There is no cooling of the affection even by death. She loves on as before, and would not go from that sepulchre. Her dead Lord was dearer to her than all those living around her. To find Him, though in the grave, was to find more than father or mother. Ah! that lily had a beautiful and tender blossom, though wet with the dew of tears—all the more beautiful for those dewdrops.

You see the tender blossom of the lily, in the *poor woman* who elbows her way through the crowd, saying, "If I may but touch the hem, etc., I shall be whole." You see it in the conduct of the *two sisters* when they said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died." You see it in *Nathanael* (John i. 48); in *Ephraim* (Jer. xxxi. 18-20); in *Peter* (Matt. xxvi. 75); in *Josiah* with his "tender heart"; in the *publican* "smiting on his breast," etc.; in *David* (Ps. cxix. 136); and in the men who sighed over the corruptions of the Church in Ezekiel's days (Ezek. ix 4).

All this tenderness of piety proceeds from the falling of the Divine dew.

3. *A new rush of life.* "Or ever I was aware my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib" (Song vi. 12). "Did not our hearts burn within us," etc.? (Luke xxiv. 32). This dew can make men raise the shout even in this world, "To Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood," etc. (Rev. i. 5). One feels like Bunyan when his prison walls seemed to grow warm around him, as he traced the progress of the pilgrim, on from the City of Destruction up to the realms of eternal day. The house of God becomes the happiest home on earth, where all the exercises seem like the ripplings and dashings of the "river of the water of life" Those on whom the dew rests are never so glad as when it is said, "Go ye up unto the house of the Lord." Their hearts are "lifted up in the ways of the Lord," and with warmest

gratitude they exclaim, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house!" No voices are more grateful than those of the shepherds, while they walk over the "delectable mountains," and point through the glass to the celestial gate in the distance.

4. *Loveliness* of piety. Sometimes, under the descent of this dew, the church becomes like a garden of lilies, where every flower has the beauty of the lily. As on the day when the Spirit was first poured out in abundance, after Jesus had been glorified. The "truth as it is in Jesus" was seen in the light of the morning sun, the shadows of night were cleared away, and the words of the Master came all true at last, both in letter and spirit. What *earnest breathings* of prayer then rose up to the throne! What *enlargement of heart* and *liberty of speech* in setting forth the newly-found truth of the cross as the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth!" What *entire consecration* of every one's self to the Saviour Lord!. What warmth of *brotherly love!* What *boldness* in "testifying to men all the words of this life!" What *steadfastness* in receiving the teachings of the despised fishermen! What *singleness of heart* and what *unbounded joy* in all the relations of life!

In the case of the individual this character is seen in every form of beauty. It "sits at Jesus' feet like Mary, and listens to His word." It "meditates on God's law day and night." Meditation returns home to her bower daily, laden with honey culled from every flower she has visited. It is a character, also, that begins with making nothing of self and everything of Christ. It adopts the motto, "less than the least;" it lies low in the dust, crying out, unclean! etc. It "takes the lowest room," "esteeming others better than itself." Also, when smitten on the one cheek it turns the other as well, rather than retaliate. It "forgives until seventy times seven," "bearing all things, believing and hoping all things." "It worketh no ill to its neighbour," but "does to him what it would wish him to do to it." In one word, it strives to live above the world, to cultivate heavenly-mindedness, and to commend the gospel of Christ to all around. It strives so to conduct itself that all who look upon it shall see, as it were, the face of an angel.

5. *Stability.* "Rooted and built-up—grounded and settled" (Col. ii. 7; i. 23; Eph. iii. 17). "From henceforth let no man trouble me," etc. (Gal. vi. 17). "Stand fast in the faith," etc. (1. Cor. xvi. 13). Making conscience of one's religious principles, and not a matter of convenience and time-serving. "Holding fast the profession of the faith without wavering." Deeds confirm words. Speaking for Christ before kings as well as mean men (Psa. cxix. 46). Maintaining one's principles with all good conscience before the world with few or with many—"faithful among the faithless;" true as steel; the same whatever wind may blow; esteeming it a "small matter to be judged of man's judgment, knowing that he that judgeth us is the Lord."

The presence of the dew makes every root take a deeper hold of the earth.

6. *Purity.* The more strength there is in a plant the better it throws off its impurities. The strength is given by the dew. Where every feature of the Christian character becomes strong through the Spirit (Eph. iii. 16), the wish becomes stronger than ever "to be found without spot and blameless" (2. Peter iii. 14; 1. John iii. 3). There is a fixed purpose to "cleanse one's self from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," etc. (2 Cor. vii. 1). The *command* looked at is, "Be ye holy for I am holy." The *pattern* copied is one "in whom there is no guile." The *position* occupied by such is, to be "separate from sinners" and to belong to God, while "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1. John v. 19). The twofold *aim* in life is to be *pure in heart* (Psa. li. 7-10; cxxxix 23, 24) and to *keep the garments clean* (Rev. iii. 4; xvi. 15).

7. *Delight in Christ's fellowship.* When flowers are filled with dewdrops, they put forth their best blossoms under the shining of the sun. Christians,

when "filled with the Spirit," long for the presence and fellowship of Christ. Then Christian character unfolds itself most beautifully, when beholding His excellence, basking in His radiance. When the soul is refreshed with the consciousness of the Divine love, and receives new proofs of its being in covenant with God as its own God, it instinctively longs to possess the virtues of the Christian character. Christ is incomparably more precious than other objects. Like the stars disappearing in presence of the sun, all rivals sink out of view.

II. The granting or witholding of this blessing is entirely in God's hands. On the one night He gave the dew here and refused it there; the next night, He withheld it from the first spot and gave it to the second. Thus he showed that the giving or withholding of the gift rested entirely with Him. The Holy Spirit is said to be "sent from the Father," and to "proceed from the Father" (John xv. 26). God calls Him "my Spirit" on many occasions. He is generally called "the Spirit of God," or "the Spirit of the Lord." In the Old Testament when He is given, God is said to "*pour Him out*" (Isa. xliv. 3; Joel ii. 28; Zech. xii. 10; Isa. xxxii. 15), or to *put Him on* His people (Ezek. xxxvi. 27; xxxvii. 13, 14). In the New Testament, God is said to *give* His Spirit (John iii. 34; 2 Cor. i. 22; 1 Thess. iv. 8, etc). Comp. Phil. ii. 13.

III. God gives this blessing in answer to prayer. It was at Gideon's earnest prayers that the dew was given or withheld. Thus it was with *Elijah* (see 1 Kings xvii. 1; comp. xviii. 42-45). When the land was scorched through want of dew and rain, the King of Israel supplicates that the needed blessing might be restored, in answer to penitence and prayer, and his supplication was heard (1 Kings viii. 35, 36, with 2 Chron. vii. 1). So it is declared, "our Heavenly Father gives His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him" (Luke xi. 13). When so large an outpouring of the Spirit took place on the day of Pentecost, it was found that the whole company of Christ's disciples in the upper room were engaged for ten days together in prayer and supplication (Acts i. 14, with ii. 2-4). There was a similar scene in Acts iv. 31-37.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ARMY OF THE LORD'S DELIVERANCE.

I. The Diminution of its Numbers.

Verses 1–8.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. **Then Jerubbaal.**] The name is given as *the challenger of Baal*, the man who, for the honour of God, was not afraid to enter the lists with Baal. This name was putting a mark of honour on Gideon, the same as if a star were put on his breast.

Rose up early and pitched beside the well of Harod.] The first flush of enthusiasm was still upon them, and they did not hesitate at once to approach the enemy. Gideon himself was decided by many proofs given that God was with him; or if any doubts were left, these had become dissipated by the sign of the dew and the fleece of wool. And the people were decided by the victory gained over Baal, and the several evidences that God had raised up Gideon to deliver Israel. Whether there was any depth in this decision was soon to be tried. "The well" means the *spring*. חָרֹד *trembling*—so called, probably, because it was the spot where the volunteer warriors first began to tremble and lose heart in the great cause they had taken in hand. A good spring of water was an important spot in such a country, and especially on the eve of battle.

The host—the *camp*—was on the north side of them, etc.] Some would render it—"he had the camp of Midian before him in the valley, to the north of the hill Moreh" (*Cassel*). This

would make Gideon to be to the north of Midian, for he had that camp between him and Moreh. But Manasseh, from which Gideon came, was, both in its hills and plains, to the south of the valley of Jezreel, so that when Gideon approached that valley it must have been from the south. We therefore read it—"*the camp was to him in the north, at the hill of Moreh, in the valley.*" מוֹרֶה—*pointer*, so called because it commanded a good view of the valley.

2. **The Lord said unto Gideon.**] This was to be Jehovah's own battle, and He therefore makes a disposition of the forces. **The people with thee are too many.**] This would sound strange in the hearing of all the people Not a man of them but thought their numbers were all too few for the hazardous task before them, and to be abruptly told they were too many, was the very thing which was fitted to dishearten them for the fight altogether. They were but 32,000 all told, while the enemy was 135,000 at the very least (Ch. viii. 10), and perhaps more. Now, too, being on the rising ground (at the foot of which was the spring of Harod), and which overlooked the valley, they could see the long, interminable spreading of tents which overshadowed the whole valley. Many a one, who at first was courageous enough, would begin to feel as Peter did "when he saw the wind boisterous, he began to sink." According to ordinary calculation, the odds were all against Israel had the numbers not been reduced (Luke xiv. 30). But when the army of deliverance was cut down from 32,000 to 10,000, and finally to 300 men, the last vestige of hope to save the nation by human prowess was taken away.

This, however, was the battle of the church of God, and it must be made clear to all, that His hand was at work in bringing about the result. It was the age in which Divine Providence was made visible in protecting the church, and it was no unwarrantable thing to expect *then* what we cannot expect *now*—a visible shield thrown around those whom God loved. It might be a great trial of faith, yet faith had much to support it in the fact that God's own honour had to be vindicated in the sight of the heathen, and the covenant engagements to His own people had to be fulfilled. All the church's battles, properly speaking, were gained by her God (Ps. xliv. 3; Zech. iii. 6; Deut. viii. 10-18).

3. **Whosoever is fearful and afraid.**] Deut. xx. 1-8. The presence of the faint-hearted in an army was a source of weakness, not of strength. **Mount Gilead.** The well-known Mount Gilead was on the east side of Jordan, whereas Gideon was now on the west side. There may have been a place of that name on the west side also, though unimportant. Or it may have been a phrase customary among the Manassites, meaning Gilead, the *rallying point* where the people were summoned to assemble for battle. **Early.** Depart *at once*. There was a tone of decision in this call. There was indeed no time to be lost.

There returned twenty and two thousand.] More than two-thirds proved craven-hearted when real danger was faced, How many at first stand forward on the Lord's side who are soon discovered not to have counted the cost! The trial was upon their fears, and they cowardly confessed it (Hos. vii. 1). But what a stern test of the courage of those who remained true to their colours! צָפַר originally signifies to twist hair or ropes; hence it means here to return in windings, *i.e.*, to slink away in by-paths. [*Keil.*] This melancholy spectacle might well have filled the hearts of the already too small army of Gideon with dismay. But the chief purpose was not to blow away the chaff, though that was done. Rather the design was to make it manifest that the sole arm that gains victories in the Lord's battles, is that of the Lord Himself. No arm of flesh must divide the glory with Him. The proneness of the human heart to boast of its own resources must be effectually checked. Hence, even the 10,000 are too many, though scarcely a proportion of one man to thirteen of the enemy. God meant to teach the lesson where the real strength of His church lay.

4. **Bring them down to the water and I will try them there.**] The dross was already removed for all the 10,000 seemed prepared to enter the battlefield. But even of those who stood the first test, some were more, and others were less, eligible—the difference between iron and steel. "The water" refers to the purling brook that was formed of such waters as flowed down from the Harod spring. צָרַף *Separate*, or elect some from the others—not the idea of purging away refuse. God himself selects every man.

5. **Brought down the people to the water.**] As if to quench their thirst well before commencing the battle. The great mass of them knelt down and drank of the stream, regardless of the danger of being in the immediate proximity of the enemy. A few were more wakeful, and only bending (without lying) down, they lapped the water with their hand, as a dog when using his tongue, but ready at a moment's notice to start to their feet, and face the foe. Sometimes little things, the very fringes of manner, indicate the sterling qualities of a man's character—his self-discipline, his wariness, his manliness and heroism. So it may have been now; and thus this simple incident furnished a test sufficient to determine the selection. Comp. the self-restraint of David in 2 Sam. xxiii. 16. The Jewish interpretation is worthy of consideration. Idolaters were accustomed to pray kneeling before their idols. Kneeling had thus become unpopular in Israel, and was studiously avoided on all occasions by the worshippers of the true God. On this occasion all the men were thrown off their guard, and each man would instinctively act according to what was customary for him to do. The kneelers would presumptively have been idolaters in the past

the lappers would have been those, who through long opposition to idolatry, never bowed the knee (comp. 1 Kings xix. 18). To bow the knee was the sign of religious worship, and was an honour due to God alone. Mordecai refused to kneel to a man (Esth. iii. 5; Isa. xlv. 23). [*Cassel.*]

7. **By the three hundred men . . . will I save you.**] The marshalling of the little army under Gideon was entirely God's own work, for he was the real commander. Gideon was in fact but a sub-lieutenant. God now designates the 300 as a fit instrumentality for Him to use, and requires the others to return to their homes. A distinct promise is made to give victory to this small handful—one man to four hundred and fifty (1 Sam. xiv. 6; 2 Chron xiv. 11; also Acts xviii. 9, 10; xxii. 18-21). The board was now clear. By means of Israel's little finger a signal victory was to be gained over the proud hosts of the vaunting foe. To count on this was a great act of *faith*. There was nothing of *sense* to support it. All stood the other way. Hence Gideon's name stands high on the roll of fame, because of his great faith (Heb. xi. 32.)

8. **The people took victuals in their hand, etc.**] The 300 did. The 9700, though willing to fight, submitted to the arrangement made as being from God, and went (perhaps reluctantly) to their homes. But they willingly supplied the small detachment who were to give battle to the foe with such provisions out of the common store, and such instruments as were needed. Thus each man of the 300 had a trumpet, a pitcher, and a lamp. The word "*retained*" seems to be significant. As a man would cling to a small boat amid a world of great waters. They were a sacred gift put into his hand by his God—the forlorn hope of Israel—a solitary star in a sky black with clouds—"a little flock of kids while the Midianites filled the country!" He would address them in words few, but from the heart. "We few—we chosen few—we band of brothers!"

II. Confidence given in the midst of weakness.

Verses 9-14.

9. **Arise, get thee down unto the host, etc.**] God orders everything—the *time* of action, as well as the *means*. The call now given meant—"the hour is come—go, and do as I have commanded you." The phrase, "unto the camp" means *against*.

10. **But if thou fear to go down.**] The fluttering state of Gideon's heart was seen by h God, and with the tender consideration of a father for a child in peril, he opens his eyes for a moment to what is going on behind the scenes. God's hand is already at work. One of the sleepers in the enemy's camp is made to dream; his fellow interprets the dream—Gideon learns from this that his name is already a terror to the invaders, and that God has begun to smite them with a spirit of trembling. **Phurah, thy servant.**] A young man. Even a mere stripling is some consolation to a hero like Gideon, under so great a pressure of responsibility. Here is a touch of the weakness of our humanity! The Saviour Himself felt it as a man, for "He was in all points tried like as we are." "Could ye not watch with me for one hour?" Small consolation could such comforters give. Like straws in withstanding a torrent. But they were the only objects at hand.

11 **Then he went down with Phurah.**] In like manner, *Diomed*, according to Homer, entered into the camp of the Trojans; and Alfred of England, according to Hume, ventured into the camp of the Danes as a harper—*the outside of the armed men*. This implies that besides the families, the servants, the camp-followers, and others, there was a special guard for the whole camp, consisting of well-trained and well-equipped fighting men. The word *chamushim* means those who acted both as van and rear guards, especially the former (Josh. i. 14; Ex. xiii. 18). Some make it the *foremost of the outposts*. [*Keil*]. Others, *to the outermost of the ranks by five*. [*Bush*]. Others, *to those who were girded for the fight*. [*P. Com.*]. Others, *as far as the line of the van-guard*. [*Cassel*]. Yet others, those who *stood in battle array*. [*Lias*]. It meant the outer rim of the encampment, and that portion of the hostile army, where their strength lay. The invaders were not absolutely a rabble, but were so far organized as that, while one section did the plundering, and another attended to the tents, the families, the baggage, and the flocks, there was another whose special work it was to fight in defence of the whole.

12. **Lay along in the valley like grasshoppers.**] (See on chap. vi. 5). The relative numbers of the two armies are again mentioned to show how completely the salvation now to be wrought was of God. But great numbers sometimes lead to a false security. There was no rampart, or protecting wall round about the encampment; so that Gideon and his attendant found no obstruction, as they crept stealthily into one of the tents. The whole multitude had gone to sleep, and *lay along*, prostrate, as if taking their night's rest. They felt secure, for there were clouds on clouds of warriors, and dromedaries, countless as the sand by the sea-shore.

13. I dreamed a dream, etc.] This was something sent by the God of Providence, equally as in the case of Pharaoh, or Nebuchadnezzar. It was no sword to wound the flesh. God has a variety of instruments to use. It was something to touch the spirit and arouse the fears. **A cake of barley-bread.** *Circular.* "A round barley-loaf rolled itself." Barley-bread was reckoned a vile food, suited only for horses and dromedaries, or the lowest menials among men. It stands in opposition to wheat or fine flour. The point of the dream was that something came rolling down from the high ground in among their tents—not a stone but a mere cake of bread, and yet when it struck one of the tents it turned it completely over. It was the humblest of all cakes, yet it sufficed to crush the tent, the tent of the chief captain of the whole host too (as many read it), and it lay in ruins.

14. This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon.] How could such a dream have been dreamed, and such an interpretation have been given, had not God specially ordered it? Nothing could have been more opportune to show Gideon that God was beginning to fill the minds of the enemy with fears for the issue of the impending conflict. And if these fears were but to increase far enough, it was easy to see how victory could be obtained. But that by which his faith was specially confirmed was the fact, that the existence of these fears proved that God was already at work on the minds of the enemy for their destruction, and if so, would assuredly complete His work. This corresponded well too, with the assurance which his God had given him when the call came to arise and go down to attack the enemy's camp. "For," says Jehovah, "I have delivered it into thine hand." It is already doomed, and my hand is already at work. The incident of the dream was a striking proof of this. God was touching the hearts of the enemy, and making them to quake for fear. This instilling of a spirit of terror into their minds was parallel to the terror with which the Canaanites were inspired, when they heard of the coming of Joshua and the Divinely-shielded people whom he led (Ex. xxiii. 27; Deut. ii. 25; xi. 25; Josh. ii. 9-11).

"The tent was an expressive emblem of the Midianites as nomads. It was their all in all. Their wives and children, their cattle and goods, their vesture and treasure were all collected in it and about it."—(*Wordsworth*). It contained their "altar and their home." Here the question is—what led the dreamer's comrade to interpret the dream as he did? Was it an evil conscience? And was it felt that the time had come for Israel's God to arise and avenge Himself, as He had so often done before, on those who had dared to tread down His people as the mire? We cannot tell the exact measure of the knowledge of Israel's God which prevailed among these heathen invaders. But there seemed to be a rumour afloat that the God of Israel was about to arise for the redemption of His people, and that a special messenger had been sent to commission Gideon to act under Him as the captain of His host. Doubtless it was of God's overruling providence that such an interpretation, as we here find, was given of the dream.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 1-14.

In the battle now to be fought, God Himself was the chief actor. In all that is said and done He takes the initiative. "The people are too many for *Me* to give the Midianites into their hand." It was indeed *the Battle of the Lord's deliverance*, and all the arrangements must be regarded in this light; while means are used, they must be disposed in such a way as to reveal the fact, that He is the great actor.

I. The objects of the Battle.

These were—

1. **To reveal the Lord's presence on the earth.** This was the characteristic of the heathen world everywhere. "They did not like to retain God in their knowledge," and so they soon lost sight of Him altogether. Hence they are spoken of as those that *know Him not* (Ex. v. 2, with vii. 5; viii. 20; xiv. 4, 18; 1 Sam. xvii. 4, 6; 2 Kings, v. 15; xix. 19; xvii. 26; Ps. lxxix. 6; lxxxiii. 18). These passages speak of God's revealing Himself in the way of judgment, among those that know him not. Israel too practically showed the same tendency of heart to "depart from the living God," when they forsook the Lord, and served other gods (chap. ii. 10, 12; 1 Kings xviii. 37, 39; Jer. ii. 32, also 11; iv. 22; v. 4; viii. 7; Hos. ii. 8, 20; Joel, ii. 27; Ezek. xxxvi. 11, 23, 36, 38). In the book of Ezekiel, the expression—"that ye may know that I am the Lord"

—occurs more than fifty times. It is always by what He does that this becomes known. Men strangely forget God's presence in His own world, and therefore sometimes He rises up and proves emphatically who is at the helm (Ps. ix. 17; xliv. 7, x. 11; Isa. v. 12; 2 Kings i. 3).

2. To vindicate His superiority to all who would usurp His place. (Dan. iv. 35). He has but to show Himself, and His enemies are scattered (Ps. lxviii. 1, etc., ix. 20; Ex. xii. 12; 1 Sam. v.; Ps. cxv. 3, 4; Isa. ii. 18). God's jealousy for the glory of His name, as being alone Jehovah, is seen in His making this the first commandment of the Decalogue. Yet to go after other gods was the besetting sin of all the nations, and Israel but too readily followed the example set.

The heathen would hardly allow that such an one as the God of Israel existed at all; therefore He takes means to show that He not only exists, but is the great "I am," and that "there is none besides Him" (Isa. xlv. 5, 6, xlii. 8, xliv. 6, 8). His superiority to the nations and their gods is emphatically asserted in the current language of Scripture. "He beheld and drove asunder the nations." "The nations before Him are as a drop of a bucket, etc., less than nothing and vanity" (Hab. iii. 6; Isa. xl. 15, 17). He is the "King of nations" (Jer. x. 7). He is "terrible to the kings of the earth." "They cannot stand before Him." (Jer. x. 10; 11–16; Deut. xxxii. 39–43). He deals with them as responsible to Him (Jer. xxv. 31, etc.). He disposes of their lot, putting down one and setting up another (Jer. xxvii. 7, etc.). He employs them as His instruments (Isa. x. 5, etc.; xlv. 1, etc.; xliv. 28; Jer. li. 20). He is angry with the heathen for their evil treatment of His people (Zech. i. 14, 15).

3. To show the sacred estimate He puts on the people who are called by His name. That they should wear His name with His permission, alone makes them sacred; not to speak of the many sacred purposes for which as a people they existed. His peculiar love for them, and the right of possession He had in them. He had also bound Himself by a solemn covenant to be their God, and to do everything for them which a God might be expected to do for His people. All this sacred relationship still existed notwithstanding of their sins, for they had not yet been cast off. "Israel was not forsaken, nor Judah of his God, though their land was full of sin against the Holy One of Israel." It was still the church of the living God on earth—the one people who were called by His name (Jer. li. 5; Isa. xliii. 10-12, 21, also 4, 7; Jer. xii. 17, xlvi. 28, l. 17-20, 33, 34).

By these marauders of the desert the people of Israel were utterly despised, and exposed to the most cruel treatment. They were regarded as fit only to be trampled in the mire. They were not allowed the dignity of being counted as one of the nations. They came up without bidding as ruthless robbers, with no pity or remorse, to serve themselves, in the most wanton manner, of the fat pastures of God's heritage, little dreaming of the awful danger they were incurring by tampering lightly with the interests of so sacred a people. These Israelites were God's redeemed ones, sprinkled with the sacred blood, and, amid all the vicissitudes of their history, were owned and jealously guarded by Him. As one wounded in the apple of his eye, Jehovah now appears in opposition to these enemies of His people, and in a little time they were to become as the "whirling dust" in the wind of His indignation (Ps. lxxxiii. 13 R. V).

The great truth, which as yet lay unrevealed, that these children of the covenant were *the people of the Messiah, and were intimately related to Him*, threw a wonderful colouring of interest around their history, and accounted for all that was so tender and jealous, so patient and forgiving, so altogether peculiar in God's ways of dealing with them. A Messianic current of truth runs under-

neath the whole of this book, and gives to it actually a far more sacred character than appears on the surface.

II. God's choice of an army.

Gideon is but a sub-lieutenant. It is God Himself who inspects the forces and determines the strength of the army. The plan of the battle is His, and He issues all the directions. Israel had little more to do than to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. Notice two things :—

I. The principle on which the choice is made. The army must be *reduced* in number, not *increased*. It was already small compared with the numbers of the enemy. Yet in God's estimation it is too large to gain the ends which He has in view. Had the Israelites been as numerous, man for man, as the Midianites, there would have been no need of any special Divine intervention on their behalf, and all the story of thrilling interest to after ages which this chapter contains would have been unwritten.

When men war with each other it is the dictate of wisdom to oppose a force on the one side equal to that which stands on the other. The resources of even the ablest commander are so limited that, when contending with a disciplined and brave enemy, he must rely on the *numbers* as well as the *valour* of his troops (Luke xiv. 31). Some cases there are in history where a general has proved victorious when fighting with only one-tenth or even a smaller proportion to the numbers of his opponent, as in the case of Miltiades at Marathon, Themistocles at Salamis, Clive in India, and some English generals, in both North and South Africa, at the present day. But the circumstances in these cases were exceptional, and do not invalidate the maxim, that a successful issue is not to be looked for by employing a very small force against one that is very large. Leonidas with his 300 Spartans were all cut to pieces at Thermopylæ, notwithstanding their deeds of incredible bravery.

The 300 men that followed Gideon were not more brave than these Spartans, and, but for an unseen power at work, they must have shared a similar fate. *The mighty God of Jacob had now placed Himself on the side of His people*, and, in order to give room for the display of His inexhaustible resources, as one who has all hearts in His hands, and all events at His disposal, human prowess must disappear. To glorify the infinite wisdom, and absolute control of all circumstances possessed by Israel's God, *weakness must be employed to conquer strength*. Israel's little finger must be made use of to break the right arm of the powerful invader; and, through the weakest instrumentality, an army, numerous as the sand on the sea-shore, who vaunted themselves against the God of Israel, must be scattered before Him as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor. Thus the character of Jehovah is vindicated in the sight of the heathen as "above all gods, strong and mighty in battle," able to "give power to the faint, and to them that have no might to increase strength." Also from Israel all grounds of boasting are taken away, so that no one can lift up his voice and say, "Mine own hand hath saved me!"

This principle of employing weakness against strength was not meant merely to clear the way for some exercise of supernatural power. Such power was indeed often exercised for the salvation of Israel; for, being the people of the Messiah, they were of such supreme importance in God's sight, that He would make every law of His natural world to give way, when necessary, for the preservation of His "peculiar people." But that He should accomplish this great end, without any disturbance of natural laws, and merely through His absolute command of all natural agencies and circumstances, so as to make them work out the purposes of His will, is a still more wonderful exhibition of His character as the Supreme Governor of the world than could have been given

by the putting forth of miraculous power. To use such a disparity of force, as the placing of one Israelite against 450 of the enemy, made it clear that salvation could not in this case come from "an arm of flesh," but from the infinite control which Jehovah exercised over all persons and events in the course of His providential rule. He could bring out 1000 issues where men could not accomplish one. He has but to touch man's heart and it is filled with fears, or suspicions, or disquieting thoughts, and a whole army is made to flee before the creations of their own affrighted imaginations (2 Kings vii.; 2 Sam. v. 24, 25). He can paralyse a man's faculties so far as to "make the diviners mad, and turn the wise men backward." The counsel of the most astute He can turn to foolishness, as in the case of Ahithophel, and the heart of the most courageous He can cause to melt as water. He can introduce confusion into the counsels of those who bear rule, and produce the phenomenon of a "house divided against itself" at the very moment of assurance of victory. Or He can awaken any element in nature to serve His purpose, from "the stars in their courses," down to the dewdrop and the rain. A man's own mind too He can distract by filling him with fearful apprehensions by day and scaring him with dreams by night.

It was to glorify the inexhaustible resources of the God of Israel, that He employed a mere handful of men to put to the rout, and utterly consume an army of the enemy, numerous as the sand on the sea shore.

2. The character of the army chosen. Though forcibly taught by this history, that success does not depend on the extent or measure of the instrumenta ity employed, yet regard is had, as a rule, to the fitness of the instrumentality. The use of natural means to accomplish Divine ends is an arrangement which God Himself has established; and the greater fitness there is in the means employed, we are warranted to expect a larger success in the result. God has respect to His own arrangement. Even in the preaching of the Gospel, while "it is ever God that gives the increase," He blesses most those means that are in themselves best adapted to produce the result (Acts xi. 24; xiv. 1). We may expect therefore, that God's army would be chosen according to the personal fitness of the men to occupy the post of peril.

(1.) *They were picked men.* They were chosen out from others as being superior to those with whom they were associated. They were men of sterling character, of rock-like intrepidity in the presence of danger, every man a hero, and all "of the stuff of which patriots are made." They all justified the choice that was made of them at this eventful crisis, by following their captain into the breach, at the call of duty, resolved to do or die for their country and their God. In physical features they were men of Spartan courage, of the lion-heart, and of stalwart frame. No weak hands or feeble knees appeared among them, but all seemed trustworthy to meet the great emergency that had arisen.

This class of men are specially needed at any crisis of the church's history. It is not numbers that form the real strength of the Church of God, but men of the right stamp. Men are needed who are "rooted in the faith," "grounded" in love, and "established" in the hope of the gospel—who have profound convictions and strong decision of character. A large number of professing Christians scarcely rise above the line of reproach for being insincere. They wear the good name. Charity supposes them to be on the right side of the line, but is not free from doubts. Tried by a low standard they pass for Christians, but they have little of the shining lustre which indicates the genuine seal of heaven.

The men that really do good, however, are those whose piety does not flicker in the socket, but burns with a bright and steady flame—those who have fixed principles as the basis of their characters, whose eye rests not below the horizon of time, but is fixed on the grand realities of eternity, and whose hearts "rejoice

daily in the hope of the glory of God." Such men do honour to the cause they espouse by their character and conduct; and they are the men who, like lightning rods, are fitted to draw down the blessing from above.

(2.) *They had faith in their cause.* The test applied to their character was so severe, that nothing but true belief in Israel's God and conscientious attachment to His cause, could have so entirely stood it, as these men did. They were the faithful "remnant" of Gideon's days; men who, in other circumstances, would have suffered as martyrs at the stake, or, for the sake of their principles, would have "wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented." They believed in Jehovah as sustaining to Israel the relation of a covenant God, who had made many gracious promises; and they counted "Him faithful who had promised." They had hope therefore in Israel's future, and believed, from the signs before them, that God was to arise even now, and vindicate His own honour in the eyes of the heathen nations that knew Him not. No other explanation will account for their staunchness. (Comp. pp. 279, 280).

Such men make a church strong, because on them the Divine smile can rest, and like true Israelites they have influence at the throne of grace. Men of great faith, when they set themselves to pray importunately for the blessing, as these men doubtless would do, "moved the hand that moved the universe." This has much to do with the success of the church of God in overcoming all opposition to her cause in the world. When she reflects most brightly the Divine image, and is filled in greatest abundance with the Divine Spirit, then is she most likely to be made an efficient instrument in blessing the world around her. (Ps. lxvii. 1, 2).

(3.) *They were careful in the use of means.* It was not by direct miraculous agency that the result was gained, but through the instrumentality of Gideon's band. God's blessing rested on the means they used, and rendered them effectual, so that the enemy was routed. They made the fullest use of the means at their disposal, and left the issue with God. There were no idle men in that army, just as there were no cowards. There were no supernumeraries, none that could be spared from their post. Every man was required to form a line long enough, in each of the three crescents, in order to produce the impression intended. Had but a few of the trumpets remained unblown, a smaller number of lights been kindled, and only a half of the pitchers been broken, less consternation and dismay had been spread in the camp of the enemy. There was no reserve, and there was no fighting by proxy. Every man was so sternly required at his post that he had to stand firm, as if on him depended the entire success of the hour.

Thus it is in the Christian army. None can plead exemption from want of capacity, obscurity of station, or insignificance of personal resources. None dare to fold his arms and refuse to fight because he cannot bring down a Goliath, or turn the tide of battle by his single prowess. None dare to leave the battle ground, because he is only a private soldier, and not a general. None dare to sleep at his post, because he sees not any great good that can be accomplished by all that he can do. All must act, and act simultaneously, each in his place, if complete success is to be attained in any field of the Christian warfare.

(4.) *They were loyal to their Leader.* They knew that Gideon did not occupy this position of himself, but that God had specially called him to it, and as they would be found faithful to God Himself, they now cleave fast to him whom God had chosen to become the Liberator of their country. There was no jealousy or envy. Whoever might be the Lord's anointed, him they would follow for the Lord's sake. The story of the angel's visit to Gideon, they had heard of, and the promise made, "I will be with thee" (vi. 16); they had witnessed Gideon as the successful challenger of Baal; the sign of the fleece and the dew they had heard of; and now at last came the story of the singular

dream about the "cake overturning the tent." By all these evidences they were confirmed in the thought, that Gideon was a man called of God, and to him as the one that God had sent, they became ardently attached as their leader. Neither the numbers of the enemy, nor the falling away of so many cowards wrought with them for a moment to make them swerve. We hear of no murmurs, no sinkings of heart, no thoughts of flight, nor laying down of arms in pure despondency at the hopeless character of the issue. But, fully confident of the result, they were all eye and ear on Gideon to announce the line of duty they should take. Hence there was nothing but prompt and silent obedience throughout the whole camp; and when it is thus in the Christian camp, success will be rapid and complete. (Comp. pp. 272-286).

III. The strong man's time of weakness, and the comforts of his God.

It appears from verse 10 that Gideon had still some lingering apprehensions in this great extremity, and his God, in tender mercy, supplies him with another additional comfort (see pp. 353-4). All, even the strongest, have such periods of weakness in the hour of great trial. As it is human to err, so it is human to be spiritually weak.

1. **Spiritual strength is not inherent in pious men.** It is not native, but given, and given as an act of grace. Though never entirely taken away, it is given in a greater or less degree according to the manner in which it has been improved, or according to the measure of their trust in their God, their conscientiousness in prayer, or their leading a consistent, God-fearing life.

The Christian's strength differs from natural courage. It consists in the upholding grace of his Master. He is "strong in the Lord" (Eph. vi. 10). So while personally weak, he may yet be strong (2 Cor. xii. 10). As sustaining grace is given or withheld he is strong or weak (2 Cor. xii. 9). Each day anew this grace is needed.

2. **Faith is ever apt to fail.** Faith has a slender root. It is not a native growth on the soil of the human heart. Hence those who are comparatively strong in faith sometimes give way under the pressure of continued trial, and become weak as other men (*e.g.* Moses, Num. xi. 11-15; Abraham, Gen. xv. 2.; Elijah, 1 Kings xix; the Martyr Church, (Rev. vi. 10; Luther, and the Reformers on many occasions. See more fully above at pp. 353, 354). It is "by faith that we stand." On this pillar the whole of our spiritual character depends. But when through long continuance of trial, our frail nature yearns for repose from the strain to which it is exposed, faith gives way, and the strong man becomes weak.

3. **Divine comforts are opportunely given.** "Fear not! I am with thee—I will not fail thee—Be not dismayed, I am thy God, I will strengthen thee, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Though thou art a 'worm,' I will make thee thrash the mountains, and beat them small." "As thy days so shall thy strength be" (Josh. i. 5; Isa. xli. 10, 14, 15; Deut. xxxiii. 25: also Isa. xl. 29-31). When these promises are realised, a great accession of strength is the result.

4. **These comforts are given with kind consideration.** As in the beautiful expression, "thy gentleness hath made me great" (Ps. xviii. 35). The Divine loving kindness is manifested in God's general dealings with the good man in the hour of peril (See Ps. ciii. 13; "the cords of a man," etc. Hos. xi. 4; "the Lord being merciful to him" Gen. xix. 16). Here he shows His finger by what seems a trifling incident. But Gideon is quick to discern it as the finger of God (Ps. xxxii. 8).

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

I. The apparent hopelessness of success for the cause of the Church. The Church of God is the same now that it was in Gideon's days. The great purpose of its existence *then* was the promotion of God's glory in the world in connection with a Messiah *to* come. It is the same end that is kept in view *now* in connection with the Messiah *as* come. He and we live but at different periods of the same great contest. The *weapons* used in the conflict are very different; the *cause* is the same and the *principles* are all the same.

The most striking feature of the conflict is the apparent hopelessness of the cause that is God's. To re-introduce the love of God into a fallen world, and to make it take deep root everywhere, when every passion and inclination, every thought, disposition, and craving of the human heart, are all dead against it, seems an utterly unattainable object.

Take any of the "dark places" of the earth as an illustration. *Select Western Central Africa.* In 1845 a mere handful of missionaries had begun to assemble on the shores of that extensive empire of Satan, with the ultimate view of bringing the vast population of 70 millions of human beings, that stretched far and wide over that large part of the continent, to the knowledge and the love of God. To the eye of an observer, how futile the attempt! How preposterous the expectation of success! To hope to Christianise our own land with such an insignificant instrumentality would indeed appear an extravagant dream. And are the difficulties fewer in Western Africa? To say nothing of the difficulties which exist there and do not exist here—to say nothing of its vertical sun, its noxious swamps, its barbarous rites, and strange language—is the master difficulty, the depravity of the human heart more easily conquered in Africa than it is in England? Can any of these Ethiopians easily change their skin, or men accustomed to do evil readily learn to do good! And if in any one individual case this is so difficult, how impossible to expect such a change of character among the myriads on myriads of that teeming population! "If the Lord should open the windows of heaven, might such a thing be?" Were God not to open the windows of heaven, such a thing would not be. On that moral wilderness "nothing but briers and thorns would come up, until the Spirit be poured from on high."

II. The success of the church is not to be estimated according to ordinary rules. The cause of the church is of higher origin than the schemes of men. It is in a peculiar sense God's own cause, and by it He is evolving in a far more illustrious manner than by any other method the moral glory of His all-perfect character. Its success, and the manner of its success, are more slowly and solemnly revealed than those of any other cause. Everything regarding the evolution of its results is more under His own immediate superintendence, and when success is effected it usually comes in such a way as to call forth the exclamation, "Is not the hand of the Lord in all this?" The most magnificent results are accomplished by the feeblest instrumentality. That "Satan should be seen falling as lightning from heaven" before the proclamation of the simple tale of the cross by plain unlettered fishermen—that the Prince of Darkness should be defeated in those fastnesses where he had reckoned himself most secure by a mere detachment of the army of the Prince of Light—affords a far higher display of moral grandeur, than could the employment of means equal to the greatness of the result, or commensurate with the difficulty of its accomplishment, have done.

III. The strength of the Church is not to be estimated by numbers. Had it been so, what would have become of her interests all along? From the beginning until now, the number of her adherents has been

small compared with the number of her foes. Under both Dispensations they have been like what the Israelites were to their enemies, in the days of Ahab—"like two little flocks of kids, while the Syrians filled the country." Yet, the standing promise of her Head is—"Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." And though faithful soldiers of the cross do fall, though standard-bearers do faint, though the ranks of the stedfast few are thinned, *the strength* of the Church is not gone, for her strength does not depend on her numbers.

The Church was small in number at a time when her enemies were gathered together as the sand by the sea-shore, a very great multitude, and when but six hundred men followed the guilty monarch of Israel trembling. But one man was found with sufficient confidence in his God to go forth alone, followed by his armour-bearer, against the armies of the uncircumcised. Trembling seized the mighty host, and victory was declared for Israel. The Church was small in the days of Elijah; yet, at the prayers of that one man, the waters of heaven were stayed, so that it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. Again he prayed and the earth brought forth her fruit. In those days, though small in number, was the Church weak? Let the event answer. He stood forth alone the prophet of the Lord, while the priests of Baal were 450 men. But at his prayer, the fire of heaven fell, the by-standers were struck with awe, and the wicked priests, who had led the people to apostatise from the true God, were put to death as the real cause of the desolation that overspread the land. The Church was small in the days of Hezekiah; but was she weak? At the voice of his prayer the angel of the Lord went forth into the camp of her enemies and slew in one night 185,000 men.

If we come to New Testament times, the church was small in number, when those assembled in the upper room at Jerusalem waiting the day of Pentecost, were but 120 persons. But was she weak? Let the events of that day answer. Through their prayers, at the preaching of a single sermon about Jesus Christ and Him crucified, by an illiterate fisherman, no fewer than 3000 souls were "added to the church of such as should be saved." During the first century of the Christian era, the church was a monument to after ages of the power of that religion which had come fresh from heaven—its power to overthrow and to cast down every thing that might exalt or oppose itself against God, to pluck up and root out every obstacle that might impede its progress.

IV. The true strength of the church lies in the presence of her Great Head.

The great promise is, "I am with you always;" and the first sentence of the church's history reads, "they went forth and preached, the Lord working with them." He gave them "power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemies." For the good of His church He holds the reins of universal government. For "He is Head over all things to His Church (Eph. i. 22; John xvii. 2). From His high seat, His watchful eye commands the entire arena of the contest. His wisdom and resources are equal to the great emergency of this world's history, now that it has become the battle field of the armies of light and darkness; His counsel shall stand, He will do all His pleasure. "Before Him every knee shall yet bow," and "His enemies shall lick the dust." "No weapon formed against His church shall prosper."

It is not a mere imagination, but a matter of history, on His own word of truth, that all power in heaven and earth is given into His hands; and we are sure He will use that power in defending a cause for which He shed His blood. The Lord Jesus is on the throne, therefore let the Church be glad. For His own name's sake He must work, until His Church go forth "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

CHAPTER VII.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE OVERRULING THE RESULT.

Verses 15–25.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**15. The interpretation thereof.]** Heb. *The breaking thereof.* A metaphor from the breaking of a nut to come at the kernel; or from a fowl's beating the shell with her beak to get out the fish. [*Trapp.*] Gideon learns that the enemy's confidencé is already broken by the belief that Israel's Lord is again in the field. [*Cassel.*] His mind is ready to believe like that of Nathanael (John i. 49). His first act instinctively is to worship his God with thanksgiving, and his next is to bound back to his little camp (not "host") with a resolute purpose to attack the foe. The sky was now clear of all doubts. The victory was as good as gained. Like an electric spark Gideon communicated his own spirit to his followers.

16. He divided the three hundred men, etc.] Not a moment is now to be lost. A plan of singular shrewdness, which he had resolved in his mind, suggested probably by his God, who was closely guiding his every movement, he begins at once to put into execution. Instructions are given to all his men as to how they should act. They are arranged in three distinct columns, to have the appearance of three armies in the darkness of night. Their weapons are trumpets, pitchers, and torches or firebrands. These last were concealed within the pitchers till the moment came for their blazing forth. This division of the men was meant to show the enemy that their camp was assailed from three different quarters (comp. 1 Sam. xi. 11; 2 Sam. xviii. 2). All were to be bold, prompt, and simultaneous in their action. On one supreme moment the whole issue depended. Gideon himself was to give the signal.

19. The middle watch.] The Romans divided the night into four watches, from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., three hours on each watch, and the Jews when conquered by the Romans followed the same reckoning (Matt. xiv. 25; Mark xiii. 35). But originally the Israelites divided the night into three watches, from sunset to 10 p.m. (Lam. ii. 19); from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. (as here); and from 2 a.m. to sun-rise (Ex. xiv. 24; 1 Sam. xi. 11). It is clear that in this case it is the old reckoning that is referred to, from the expression, "the middle watch" (Ps. lxiii. 6; xc. 4; cxix. 148; cxxx. 6).

Came unto the outermost part of the camp.] To the border of the camp. Several instances of this kind of stratagem are found in history. The famous Hannibal once extricated himself in this way when surrounded by Fabius Maximus. Also an Arab chief, during last century, made his escape from a fortress in which he was besieged by a vastly superior force through the same means. [*Niebuhr.*] By a like stratagem Pompey overcame Mithridates in Asia. [*Trapp.*]

Newly set the watch.] The first sentries had been relieved, and the second posted. Some little time must have been occupied in Gideon's making a disposition of his men, and giving them instructions; so that now it must have been probably about eleven o'clock, when the whole camp had given itself up to the deep sleep of the night season, and were calculating on enjoying several hours of an unbroken slumber (1 Thess. v. 3). Some little time, too, would be occupied by the other two companies going round, to take up their positions at different places near the camp.

19, 20. They blew the trumpets, etc.] It being pitch dark, every man being in his place and knowing what to do, stillness reigning throughout the valley, and the enemy being fast asleep in the vast multitude of his tents, Gideon, committing himself once more to God in prayer, puts the trumpet to his mouth, and with one loud piercing blast gives the appointed signal. Instantly it is followed by the terrific noise of shrill, strong blasts from three hundred other trumpets piercing the night air, and the next moment to that is added the crashing of three hundred pitchers among the rocks close by the camp of the sleepers, as if the whole heights around about had become vocal with fury against the spoilers of Jehovah's heritage. And while terror thus fell on the ear, the moment the eye looked, there were three hundred torches blazing ominously full in view, as if they were avenging deities come to execute the sentence of doom. All this was followed by the terrible cry—*The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon!*—the two names which, of all others, were most dreaded by the conscience-stricken Midianites.

21. All the host ran, etc.] As with the shock of an earthquake the whole camp of the enemy was startled, and awakened from sleep. Alarm filled every breast; consternation took possession of the myriads on myriads that spread themselves for miles along the valley; and an affrighted imagination added tenfold creations of its own to the actual realities of evil around them. Three hundred trumpets were blowing, and 300 torches were blazing, but to the terrified onlookers in the valley they seemed to be thousands. And these thousands of torch bearers seemed to be but lighting the way to a large army behind them. There was running hither and

thither as among those who are distracted. The panic was universal. None thought of making a stand against the danger. Terrors swept the whole valley like a whirlwind.

They cried—in terror. Everything was lost. Their cattle, their spoil, their tents and baggage, their wives and children, and dear life itself were in jeopardy. Being in darkness they supposed an avenging army was already among them, and they mistook friends for foes. Suspicion also arose among them, that one part of the camp was treacherous to the other parts—that being of mixed nationalities, the one race began to plot against the others. And so from different causes "*the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow.*" (1 Sam. xiv. 20; 2 Chron. xx. 23). Hence arose a dreadful slaughter throughout the whole camp. In blind and helpless confusion they ran on smiting down all that came in their way.

Beth-shittah.] House of acacias. The course of the flight was at first eastward, along the main road to Bethshan, and the Jordan, then southward down the Arabah, towards Jericho, where they might more easily cross the river. But it was a headlong route without thought, or order, or object. The one idea was to save life.

Abel-meholah—the birth-place of Elisha, about 10 miles below Bethshan. The rising sun beheld them turned into a rabble of fugitives, rushing in the wildest terror towards the fords of Jordan.

23, 24. Men of Israel were gathered, etc.] The cowards who had turned back, but especially the 9700 who, though not cowardly, had not been accepted by God to form part of His select army. Also all who had any spark of patriotism left in their bosoms among the Northern tribes. Swift messengers too were sent by Gideon to the hill country of Ephraim, that they should come down and intercept the enemy at those parts of the Jordan that were over against their territory. The Midianites doubtless fled in more detachments than one, so that Gideon could not follow them in all the routes they took without help. It was besides highly politic to give the Ephraimites some share of the honours of so memorable a day.

25. They slew Oreb on the rock Oreb, etc.] The two princes had taken shelter, one in the cavern of a rock, the other in the vat of a wine-press. Both these places, from this circumstance, were afterwards called by their names respectively. Oreb, signifies a *raven*, and Zeeb, a *wolf*; both significant names of the rapacity which characterised these marauding chiefs. "These princes had forced Israel to hide in the rocks, and had robbed them of their provisions, and now the God of Israel makes them see their sin in their punishment" (Judges i. 7). [*Trapp.*]

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 15–25.

I. The Hand of the Lord visible in this deliverance.

It is quite manifest that the overruling Providence of God was at work in all this to bring out the result. This is seen—

I. In the general effect produced. Victory was gained in a few minutes, and without striking a blow—Israel did not need to lift sword or spear. There was no battle—only a rout, disastrous and complete. Not a single man was lost of Gideon's men—not a wound or scar was given. They did not need to fight, but to stand still and see the salvation of God. In place of swords we see trumpets, pitchers, and torches; and yet through the whole camp of Midian, such was the state of terror, that "none of the men of might did find their hands." There is no such thing possible as fighting against the mighty God of Jacob. There must have been some remarkable influence at work to have produced such a result as this.

II. In the use of the particular means employed. It was by one special cause that the issue was brought about—the rousing of the fears of the enemy to such an extent, as to paralyse all regular or orderly action. This was done in the simplest but most effective manner.

(1.) *Gideon was directed to form a plan fitted to produce the result.* In this and all other steps he seems to have been Divinely guided. At this moment, all his movements seem to have been taken in hand by his God, for he was the instrument in God's hand employed to carry out His designs; and though he was left a free agent, as at other times, there was yet an overruling of the

workings of his mind, while forming his plans and purposes. There is, indeed, nothing supernatural in the plan itself, however much skill and natural shrewdness it may indicate. There was no violation of natural law.

The *time* chosen was the dead of night, when all was dark around, and when the whole camp was sunk in slumber. The *place* occupied was the heights around the camp, especially at three different points. To produce a hideous noise all round the camp at a moment's notice while profound silence reigned, and to keep up that noise with the blare of 300 trumpets, was not only fitted to startle the sleepers, but to strike them with terror. The effect of this too would be vastly increased by the tossing of 300 burning torches in the air, right in view of those who were newly-awaked from their slumbers. To make use of such a moment for a fierce attack on the enemy by a handful of resolute men, was certain to throw them into hopeless confusion.

(2.) *Divine support was given in carrying out this plan.* The best laid schemes often prove abortive from not being well executed. Nerve is required; precision must be observed; circumstances must be anticipated. Here everything went right. There was *unity* in Gideon's camp. There was the most perfect discipline. All were zealous for the cause, as the cause of God. All acted on religious principle, and there was more than natural courage. Much of the same spirit that rested on Gideon also rested on his followers. It was the Lord's battle they were fighting, and He "sends none a warfare on their own charges." He gives grace according to the day (Deut. xxxiii. 26). There was no timidity in the face of a great danger. Not one was feeble in all the ranks of that little brave army. The tone of true courage was everywhere marked, and the Leader could count on every man doing his duty when the moment for action arrived.

(3.) *The enemy's feeling of security remained undisturbed.* There are so many possibilities of information leaking out before the time, that one great danger of the plan miscarrying lay in the fear, that some hint might be given to the hostile army, that a desperate attempt was to be made to surprise them during the night. But the God of Providence so overruled matters, that no intelligence was carried to the ears of the Midianites of any such design. They would indeed be slow to listen to any such tale, so profound was their contempt for the prowess of the people, whom they had seven times trampled down in the most reckless manner. They did not believe in their capability of showing a formidable front to their oppressors. In this they were more than confirmed, when they saw first, how many thousands flocked to Gideon's standard, and yet, in a few days, the great bulk of them began to return to their homes with as much haste as they had left them.

So do the enemies of the Church often imagine that all is over with the Church of God, when they see her cut down to the very roots, and no means of restoration are at hand. Thus did Ahab and Jezebel feel, when the prophets of the Lord were persecuted out of the land (1 Kings xviii. 4; xix. 10). Doubtless, too, the chief priests and Pharisees felt sure that they had heard the last of Jesus of Nazareth, and that His cause was for ever extinguished, when they made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch. The Church of Rome felt secure from all that Protestantism could do, when the famous proclamation was made from the Lateran Church, that now at last heresy was everywhere subdued, and that there were none that did even mutter or peep against the power that reigned supreme in the Imperial city.

(4.) *A foundation was laid for filling the enemy's mind with fears.* The mighty deeds which had been done by Israel's God at different periods, since the remarkable deliverance from Egyptian bondage, had made a profound impression on all the heathen nations, and however much they hated that God, a salutary fear of His hand was cherished by them all. On the present occasion

it got rumoured, that that God was again about to appear on behalf of His people, and the Midianites appear to have heard of it. This is clearly implied in the case of the dream and the interpretation given of it, which Gideon heard in the outermost part of the camp of Midian. But as yet they slept securely, because no danger was visible. They felt, however, that danger was in the air, so that they were prepared to be struck with panic, when that dreadful name *Jehovah* was proclaimed over their heads in the darkness of night. Just as Jehovah looked through the cloud and troubled Pharaoh's host, and took off their chariot wheels, so now He was beginning to produce a ground swell in the Midianitish heart, by the terrible suspicion that He had marked them out as the victims of His strong anger. Hence the power of the motto—*The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon!* All this was evidently of God.

(5.) *The sudden alarm produced distracting thoughts.* No instrument sounds so loudly as the trumpet; and here were 300 such instruments blowing from three different sides, making a noise sufficient to startle the heaviest sleeper, and fill him with terror. At the same moment, 300 empty pitchers were broken with clattering noise among the rocks, a noise, coming as it did so unexpectedly, sufficient to shake the firmest nerves. The two noises coming together, making such a volume of sound, and rending the midnight air in the most unaccountable manner, could hardly fail to produce a terrible panic among the vast multitude, who had given themselves over to the quiet and security of sleep. It added greatly to this effect, that there were 300 ominous lights flashing in the dark back ground, in three crescents, on different sides of the camp. All this was fitted to produce not only alarm, but consternation among persons suddenly awakened out of the dead sleep of night.

Yet, but for the overruling Providence of God, it might have proved a complete failure. The enemy's camp did not all consist of women and children. A very large number, probably the majority, were fighting men. We hear of the *chamushim* (ver. 11) men not only *armed*, but *arrayed in divisions*, or quinquiped men—marshalled as an army in five divisions, the centre, two wings, the front and rear guard. This is suggestive of order and even discipline. Why should an organised army, that occupied the part of the camp nearest to Gideon, become all at once so penetrated with terror? Did they not know that the many followers, who at first had flocked to Gideon, had become literally scattered among the valleys and caves as before? And they knew of no other army in the field all round. Was it not fairly possible, or even probable, that after the first startling noise, knowing the above fact, their leaders would have sent messengers to ascertain the strength of the army on the heights, for they were themselves an almost innumerable host, and well able to meet in the field any ordinary army. When they had such a contempt for the people who fled before them like sheep, and hid themselves in dens, and caves, and rocky strongholds, why should they all at once become frantic with terror, and run in mad haste to escape the swords of that same people? It does seem as if there were a Divine ordering of the means used to bring out so disastrous an issue.

He who has all hearts in His hand made use of the means which Gideon employed to suggest dreadful thoughts to the minds of the enemy.

(*a.*) *They imagined that a great army was just upon them.* How it had been raised they knew not, but their eyes and ears told them it was there. Such an army looked like a dreadful apparition, a thing from the spirit world, a legion of spectres and weird demons, mysteriously raised, mysteriously armed, and possessed of mysterious powers. The effect on superstitious imaginations must have been electric. They fled as men would flee from a company of unearthly forms issuing from the pit of darkness.

(*b.*) *They were afraid of the God of Gideon.* That terrible sentence which sounded in their ears—"The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon" filled them

with dismay, as they reflected that so great a God was about to repeat His mighty acts of the past, in raising all the elements of nature, and of the spirit world as well, to overwhelm his enemies. As the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for Jehovah fighteth for them against us," so did the leaders of that doomed army say to each other; and so they thought of nothing but flight. They believed they were to be a mark for the arrows of the God of Israel.

(*c.*) *The suspicion of treachery* rose among them. They were a mixed company, several armies joined in one, the only link of union being their common hatred and contempt for the people of Israel (Ps. lxxxiii. 5-12)—Amalekites, Moabites, Midianites, and Arabs. As no one knew how it was possible that a large army could rise up against them in a moment, the thought must have flashed across the minds of many—"*there is treachery in the camp.*" Some one or two of the races must have laid a plot to massacre all the rest, to secure the whole booty for themselves. Distrust thus arose among them, and we are told, "the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow." A frightful slaughter of each other began. This demoralisation became complete when they feared also that the supposed large army on the heights was already among them. In the pitch dark, and amid the utter confusion, every man took his neighbour for an enemy, and so smote him down. All the while the panic urged them instinctively to flight. Large numbers would be trodden down, beause they impeded the progress of those who were flying for their lives. Thus thousands on thousands would perish of the mutual slaughter, before the swords of the Israelites were among them.

Who does not see that the hand of the Lord was in all this, stirring up terror in every heart, and leading to a ruinous flight?

(6.) *Pursuers sprung up on all sides with the morning light.* When God deals with His own people for their sins, it is in chastisement, and He corrects in measure. But when He deals with His enemies for their sins, it is for their destruction. Thus it was now. Means are taken for the utter overthrow of the whole host, that had dared for seven years in succession to come up as spoilers of God's heritage. Besides the 300, the 9700 who had been disbanded, and large numbers of the Israelites, north, west, and south, gather in swift and simultaneous concert to smite the common enemy. And the remarkable fact appears, that, whether it was that their flight was terribly obstructed by their families, their dromedaries, their luggage, and possessions of various sorts, or whether special facilities were furnished to the pursuers for coming up with them, it happened that *eight parts out of nine* of this multitudinous host perished before they could cross the Jordan! It is expressly stated that 120,000 men out of 135,000, fell on that fatal morning, of those that drew sword (ch. viii. 10). How many men of a different class there may have been, those who were purveyors, servants, cattle-drivers, etc., as also how many women and children, we are not informed, but the number must have been much larger. Possibly the entire army of human locusts that settled down on the rich pastures of Israel was not much short of half a million of persons! And now they all perished! "The sword of the Lord was drunk with their blood" (Jer. xlvi. 12). Wicked men should fear to offend the great Jehovah (Zech. ii. 13; Ps. ii. 12; x. 13; lxxvi. 5-10; Job xxi. 30; xxii. 21; Ps. xxxiii. 8; Isa. iii. 10, 11).

II. A Picture of the Church's Experience in every Age.

At all periods the church has been *a mark for the rage of earth and hell.* It is natural that Satan should do his utmost against an institution, whose purpose is to overturn his throne and destroy his kingdom. And it is natural that worldly men should have bitter hatred to that which condemns all their evil

desires and cherished lusts, and insists on the practice of self-denial as a leading virtue. The forms of attack may change, the weapons used in the warfare may be greatly different, and the conditions may become greatly modified in different ages, but the warfare itself always goes on, the rancour of the world is still kept up, and the same malicious treatment is given, or is tried to be given, to the church *now* as was given to it in the days of the Midianitish invasion. He and we live, but at different periods of the same great contest. He fought to keep up the cause of God on the earth then, as we are called on still to propagate and maintain that cause under the form of the gospel of Christ, but with very different weapons.

For what is the picture of the church's experience in these times?

1. She is still surrounded by enemies numerous as the sand on the sea-shore. If, indeed, there is no actual army with sword and spear, as in Gideon's days, there is yet, even in so-called Christian lands, a vast multitude of persons who are inveterately opposed to the essence and spirit of christianity, and whose opposition to it appears in a variety of ways. If carnal weapons are no longer used, and if instruments of torture are laid aside—if Geshem, the Arabian, no longer lives, nor Sanballat, the Horonite, there is yet bitter offence taken at the Cross of Christ, which shows itself either in the open forms of *infidelity*; in attacks made on the Book of God; in endeavours to secularise the day of God, and to abolish the worship of God, and in sneering at those who profess the truth of God; or which shows itself in the more covert, but still more dangerous, form of perverting and falsifying the truth of God, of inventing a substitute for the gospel of Christ, of mixing it up with the traditions or philosophy of men, and, as far as possible, passing it by altogether. Indeed, every human heart, until regenerated by the Holy Spirit, is characterised by a spirit of enmity against God, and, except in so far as bridled by powerful moral restraints, is disposed to show a bitter Midianitish opposition to the church of God. Except those who have given themselves up to the belief and the sway of Christian truth, all men are more or less natural enemies to the church of God, and its high spiritual purpose.

2. The enemies are a heterogeneous confederation. First comes *Science*, with her lofty air and many tongues. In a very dogmatic manner she attacks the dogmas of the sacred book, forgetting that science itself consists almost wholly of dogmas. Proud of her acquisitions in useful knowledge, she asserts more peremptorily than ever, that the laws of nature as now discovered, tell a different tale from that which we have in the historical statements of the Scriptures. And in their extreme haste, a host of savans already proclaim, that Christianity has been reasoned off the stage. But the old rock keeps its place amid the lashings of the waves. Next comes *Philosophy*, boasting that it is in the track of some great discoveries, by which the doctrines of Christianity may be dissipated, and the supernatural element taken out of them, so that they will soon come under the proper control of human reason, and therefore become suited to human liking. Next rises up *Criticism*, which tells us there are ever so many discrepancies between what is now known outside the Scriptures to be true, philological, archæological, antiquarian, and otherwise, and the affirmations of the old volume itself.

Closer at hand we have all the schools of our modern Areopagus clamouring in our ears more insolently, and we might add, more discordantly still, than the groups of learned men on that hill of wisdom in Athens—the schools of *Atheism*, of *Agnosticism*, of *Positivism*, of *Deism*, *Theism*, *Pantheism*, of *Rationalism*, *Naturalism*, and *Spiritualism*, of *Broad-Churchism*, and *Formalism*—all of which ardently aim at getting quit, not of the beauties of the Bible,

nor its good morality, nor its just, pure and lofty sentiments so much, as first its element of the *supernatural;* for *that* is felt to be terribly humbling to man's pride of understanding, and puts him down to the footstool, when he would fain climb to the throne. They wish to get quit too of its *inspiration and oracular authority;* for that binds man to believe what he is taught by testimony, and makes his reason a subject, not a sovereign. It also suggests the idea of a Lord of the conscience. They wish to get quit too of the doctrine of *human responsibility;* for that makes conscience a troubled sea in the soul, at the thought that man will be judged for all his thoughts, words, and actions. Especially they wish to get quit of such a doctrine as *human depravity;* for that is reproachful to man's character as a moral being, and sinks him to shame and contempt in the estimation of the morally pure and holy. They wish above all to blot out from the page of history, and if they could, from the page of human thought, the doctrine of the death of the Son of God being *the suffering of a substitute endured to atone for the sins of men;* for that is to intensify inconceivably the evil of sin, reveals the alarming condition of man's prospect for the future, and proves his utter powerlessness to help himself in the terrible emergency.

All these enemies of the Christian Church want, in one word, to get quit of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, as being most distasteful to man's unspiritual nature, and most humbling to his imperial and stubborn will. They would refit the Bible, or reconstruct it so as to make it speak in quite another tone. Intead of being governed by it, they would govern it, and transform it into a Book that would suit the convenience, and establish the glory of man.

3. The attacks are persistently made. The language used against the Book which contains the doctrines of Christianity was never more bold, we might say, audacious, than it has been during the present century. Formerly, it may have been more coarse, and ribald, when such men as Voltaire, Paine, Rochester, and Hume, poured their vile abuse on the good Book. Yet in this age, far more liberty of opinion is claimed than in any past epoch. Never was public opinion stronger, and never did liberty run so far in the direction of laxity. It has indeed become a rage—a passion. The pendulum has swung from the point of over-strictness, to that of over looseness. The result is, that never has there been such boldness in casting aside old forms of belief, and even the beliefs themselves. After so many failures, the attacks on the old Rock are still kept up, and with renewed confidence, it is defiantly asserted, that not only must Christianity moult, and change its garb, but, in these advancing times, must change in its very substance. Old ships, it is said, do not weather tempestuous seas so well as those of fresher build. So, many have taken to imagining, that the old vessel of Christianity will not hold out much longer amid the tremendous seas that are now lashing over her, but that she must soon go to pieces and become a total wreck. Others, who do not take this extreme view, yet think the time has come when the ship must be laid up in the dock, and undergo much refitting and reconstruction to prepare her for future service.

These attacks have been most numerous, most formidable, and most envenomed. They have come in on every side, and been made with united force. Notwithstanding all the falsification of past predictions respecting the defeat of Christianity, the opposition to it is as persistent to-day as ever it was in any previous age. But one thing is always strangely forgotten, that He who constructed this vessel is the same with the builder of heaven and earth, who holds the waters of human strife in the hollow of his hand, and without whose permission not a single ripple can rise or fall. The raging sea of human opinions may run mountains high, yet the little skiff which carries the Church of God cannot be swallowed up by the threatening element, while the Lord of the Church

walks on the crest of the waves, able in a moment to still them at their wildest fury.

4. Every possible advantage is on the side of the enemy. Here the Church fights her battle with 300 against 135,000 men, or one man against 450. In the case of Jonathan, it was two men against many thousands. In the case of Samson, it was one man against several thousands. In the case of Joshua and his followers, it was one nation against many nations, for the Canaanites were really a cluster of separate kingdoms. There is a special purpose to be served by this arrangement. The Church of God, representing the cause of religious truth in this world, is far too mighty for error to stand before her when opposed on equal terms. Error, in such a case, could no more maintain its ground, than darkness could cope with the rays of the noonday sun. There could indeed be no battle at all, and all the moral purposes served by the prolonged opposition of the one to the other would come to an end.

Error needs all possible resources to help her. The subtleties of logic, the splendours of eloquence, powers of reasoning, and charms of literary accomplishment; while plain, unadorned straightforward statement stand on the other side. Erudition, philosophy and science plead her cause, poetry weaves for her a many-coloured robe of beauty, while fame puts a crown of gold on her head, gives a sceptre into her hand, blows the trumpet before her, and calls on the multitude to bend the knee at her name. But truth must stand alone, in humble garb, and mean attire, and with unsophisticated speech must plead her own cause. The world's dread laugh and proud supercilious scorn she meets with showing her native majesty of mien and purity of tone. The cause of truth too is often most injudiciously handled by her defenders, they often fall out among themselves, and do irreparable mischief by their dissensions. But the advocates of error have generally been men of great mental grasp and profound scholarship. Truth in one word is placed at its weakest to contend with error at its strongest, that so a far more illustrious triumph may be gained in the end, than if the advantages enjoyed on either side had borne some pro portion of equality to each other.

But there is not only inequality of advantage. Truth has always been exposed to the grossest misrepresentation, while her character and claims are miserably misunderstood. We see Christian truth perverted, parodied, mystified, and falsely accused. The whole treatment of the cross has been measured out anew to the truth of the cross—she has been betrayed and stabbed in secret, and mocked and vilified in open day. A whole army of detractors, scoffers, and calumniators have kept continually dogging her steps, until she might well say in the language of Him whose name is "The Truth,"—"Reproach hath broken my heart!"

5. The inherent power of Bible truth makes victory certain in the end. The little finger of truth is thicker than the loins of error. With that little finger she has gained world-renowned victories. "With the jaw of an ass she has slain a thousand men." With the blowing of rams' horns she has made the fortified cities of the enemy fall down flat. With sling and stone, in the hands of a stripling, she has felled to the earth the proud Goliath in the camp of her opponents. With a shepherd's crook used by a fugitive herdsman, from the backside of the desert, she has routed the proud Pharaoh who opposed her, and found a watery grave in the great ocean for his huge bannered host. When Christian truth went out into the world to fight her way to victory, she was without learning, without caste, without wealth, and without a particle of influence in society. I see Paul and Barnabas, on their first missionary tour, going across the mountains of Pisidia, without armies and without arms, having

no fame or prestige, with nothing but a good conscience within, the word of God in their hands, and their exalted Master looking down on them from the throne in the heavens. It was weakness employed to conquer strength, folly to confound wisdom.

I look again, and see the advocate of christianity surrounded by the learning and culture of the world, and treated with derision and scorn. "What will this babbler say?" pitched the key-note of the obloquy which Mars Hill thought fit to pour on the doctrine of the cross! The wise of this world thought it too much honour to give it a hearing at all! Again I see him a prisoner, answering for himself before men who were strangers to pity, and but capriciously acquainted with justice, yet through the simple force of truth, he causes his judge to tremble on the seat of power, and constrains royalty itself to exclaim, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a christian!" *Once more, I see him within the gloomy walls of the martyr's dungeon*, with life and all that men count dear behind, and with the dreary horrors of a barbarous death before him—alone, unbefriended, unsuccoured, he is yet the happiest man in Rome! Among the millions within her wide walls, not another heart is so buoyant with hope, so lifted up with joy. Nor need we wonder. His prospects at that moment were brighter than those of any other man on earth. That dark and cheerless cell was his last resting-place on earth. Soon his feet should stand within the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem. One of the loftiest seats around the throne should soon be his. One of the sweetest songs in the land of bliss should soon be raised by him. As he thought of this, his afflictions became light, and lighter still, until he felt them not at all. He would not, at that moment, have exchanged his position with that of him who sat on the throne of the world. Nero was wretched! Paul the prisoner was filled with joy unspeakable! Terrors reigned in the soul of the tyrant! A peace passing all understanding possessed the mind of his captive! He that stood on the summit of earthly greatness was afraid of all around him—afraid even of himself! His unprotected prisoner, awaiting a violent death, stood undaunted amid the rage of earth and of hell!

6. Hope for Christian Missions everywhere. This does not admit of doubt for a single moment, when the attitude of Christian Truth to Error is understood. The reason why universal success has not been attained long since, is not because the resources of that Truth are not equal to the occasion. But there has been *a holding back* of the real power which it possesses. Not the one-hundredth part of its resources has been called forth; and so, many fall into the mistake, that it may yet die out and be overcome. This mistake is all the more easily made, that opposing systems are usually so demonstrative of their apparent successes, and so pretentious and confident as to what they will be able to accomplish in the future. Hence it is inferred, that the two forces are not unequally matched, or that the one at least bears some proportion to the other; so that some doubt must be held to rest over the final result. In reality, Error, whatever form it may assume, has in itself no power at all to contend with Christian Truth, any more than dark clouds have power to prevent the rising of the sun, or than men have power to contend with the silent irresistible strength of a law of nature.

(1.) *Christian Truth lays its hand on the supreme powers of a man's nature*—his *conscience*, that mysterious faculty whose volcanic force when awakened creates greater disturbance in the soul than all other causes combined; his *will*, that kingly faculty which decrees with the force of a Medes and Persians law what the man is to do; his *desires and affections*, which like a helm turn the soul in whatever direction they are pleased to take. All the secret springs of a man's moral nature are touched by this Truth, and it is too mighty to be shaken off.

(2.) *This truth is no product of earth.* No soil, East or West, of this barren world could produce such a plant. The Everlasting Father Himself did plant it. Long before the cycles of Time began to revolve, this Mighty Truth was with God, and that which had its birth in Eternity cannot perish among the rocks and the wildernesses of Time.

(3.) *This truth is a system of facts.* It contains the history of persons that lived, and of events that occurred—"things seen and heard." The theories of philosophers are nebulous; their schemes are fancies or day-dreams, and however beautiful, necessarily pass away. Their propositions are often mere abstractions which cannot be realised in every-day life. No entire system of truth, at once plain, full of substance, and adapted to man's practical needs all round, has ever been presented to the world but Christianity. Hence its power to live. It has life in itself, and it has power to give life to others. Thus it can stand the tear and wear of time for many generations.

(4.) *This truth is an instrument in the hand of the Supreme Ruler.* This all-important fact must never be forgotten. The power of Christianity does not consist merely in its being what it is, but in its being wielded by Him who has all power in heaven and earth to accomplish the high purposes of His will. "It is mighty through God to the pulling down," etc. (see John xvii. 2; Mark xvi. 20). He has but to "pour out His Spirit, and the wilderness should become as the fruitful field." Every day would be as the day of Pentecost, until the whole world should spiritually bloom in every part like a second Eden.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 15–25.

I. The great men of the Bible are its good men.

Judged by his deeds, and the spirit in which he performed them, none will refuse to Gideon the epithet of great. Yet on analysing the elements of his character, we do not so much emphasize his great daring, his heroic spirit, his shrewdness and skill, nor even his disinterested devotion to his country. It is rather his zeal for the cause of his God, his sorrow that the Church of God should be trodden down by the unhallowed foot of the alien, and that the name of his God should be every day blasphemed, on the one hand, that form the noblest features of his character, while on the other hand, he holds himself ready at the Divine call to perform a humanly impossible task, at every risk to his own interests, to retrieve the dishonour done to the Divine name, and all on the basis of the *trust* he has in the God who made Himself over to Israel to be their God. It was by his faith that he became great (Heb. xi. 2, 32, etc.), and that marks him out equally as a man of piety. But for his faith, he never had subdued so effectually the mighty army of the desert and annihilated their numerous hordes. It was not natural courage or skill in disposing his little army, or indomitable patriotism that gained him such signal success, though these were all in exercise, but his faith in his God—trusting in His character and relying on His promises, that earned him his high distinction.

But for the connection, into which true faith brings a man with his God, his deeds, and his very existence, are at the best an ephemeral phantom, an airy nothing, which soon evaporates, not to be heard of more in the ages to come. But the touch of Divinity creates around a man an immortal memory, and His name cannot drop into oblivion. Hence this book of Judges cannot be classed with other records, which relate the deeds of martial prowess performed by the heroes of olden times, for in these, we merely see the natural qualities which belong to the heroes themselves, and are entirely of an inferior category to that faith and love that zeal and

self-denial, which link the soul to its God.

II. The great value of a single good man to the age in which he lives.

A single good man placed in the foreground gives a character to the whole generation to which he belongs. When the moon goes down, were all the stars of first magnitude abstracted from the sky of night, what a miserable appearance would that sky present when shorn of its brightest beauties! And how tame would this book read without the four or five names of its men of faith! These redeem it from being a dull heavy record, and throw a splendour over the page which makes it shine with lustre to latest ages. There is something of God about such men, for it is not their own glory that shines, as they freely confess by the fact that they live and do all by *faith*. It is truest philosophy this faith, as well as the purest piety. It is the unit confessing itself nothing before the Universal, the finite laying hold of the infinite, the drop losing itself in the ocean! It is the little child confessing its feebleness and its foolishness, in the presence of the Possessor of boundless power and unsearchable wisdom. It is the humble heart opening itself out before the fountain to receive promised blessings, with the view of returning these blessings again in songs of gratitude and praise. Thus it is always God that is really glorified, the creature confessing it has nothing but what it receives, and reflecting as a mirror all the glory that falls upon it from the infinite source.

The good man having God with him is ever invincible. The very heavens bend before the prayers of Elijah. He is felt to be a greater power in the land than Ahab and Jezebel. In that heyday of idolatry, a louder protest was uttered against the worship of false gods, through the instrumentality of that single man, than had been known for ages in the history of Israel. But for him, though standing alone, even Carmel would have been submerged by the rising tide of idolatry. Who does not see that but for Barak and Gideon in their respective periods, the whole history of Israel would have come to a miserable termination ere it had half run its expected course. Truly are they called the "saviours" of their people, as God's instruments raised up by Him for this purpose (Neh. ix. 27).

Over the whole of Old Testament times, if you subtract some twenty names the value of history sinks down by fifty per cent. Not that these were the only actors. But common men could not have taken their place, and these inspired common men with confidence in their power to lead, and their Divine commission to lead others, so that they formed rallying points for large numbers acting in unity. However much a man may excel his fellows in intellect, and fortitude, and general resources, he must always find it wise to have many co-workers with him in doing a great work, unless when specially directed and assisted by his God. The great Napoleon gave it as one of the principles of his tactics, "I have always tried to march so as to have a million of men in sympathy with me." Often however the great men of the Bible were employed by God to do His work with but few followers, for He himself went with them, and His presence counted for a thousand armies.

III. God's severity in the day of reckoning.

This in any harsh sense is more apparent than real. It was a frightful destruction of human life that took place when the whole of that huge host were slaughtered, leaving none, or only a few stragglers, to return to their country to tell the tale. It was very nearly the annihilation of a race from off the earth. Many hold up their hands and utter exclamations of horror at such terrible cruelties being perpetrated in the name of God. Yet they cannot account for it by setting it down to the barbarity of the times. For it was really done by God's own direction. The truth is that, in judging of God's doings, men forget the extremely offensive character of the sin which draws down the punishment, the length of

time during which the sin has been going on, and the warnings and expostulations used by God with the wicked to forsake their ways. Were these men, who profess to be so humane and pitiful, while they look on so awful a destruction, to receive themselves one-tenth part of the offence which these heathen nations gave to the true God, they would, without doubt, smite down, and not spare, every man who should dare to act so wicked a part, and would wonder if any should cry out for mercy to their victims.

But the great Jehovah punishes not like man. He is indeed strict to mark iniquity and "every disobedience and transgression receives a due recompense of reward." But it is not from uncontrollable feelings of what men call passion and revenge that He acts in any case. To such feelings the Divine bosom is an absolute stranger. God knows nothing as a Moral Governor but the calm and just administration of law. It is justice alone with which He is concerned when punishing the wicked, not the gratification of any vindictive feelings towards the transgressors. Anything vindictive is an impossibility to the nature of God. If such language is sometimes used in Scripture it is only as a figure of speech, when His acts have the appearance to men's eyes of being vindictive. But nothing more is given to the vilest criminal than the due desert of his sin. Men, however, strangely underrate that desert, and there is all the mystery.

These Midianites had heard of the mighty God of Israel in the past. The deeds which He did on behalf of His people were before the eyes of all the nations, and they ought to have known it was a wicked and dangerous thing to tamper with such a people and their God. If they knew but little, they ought to have made themselves better acquainted with the great Jehovah, for God never rejected heathen inquirers. Yet, knowing the character of this God to be different and immeasurably superior to all gods, they dared to spoil His heritage and to blaspheme His name. Hence their punishments.

IV. God's complete control over all the states and moods of men's minds.

It was He that led these enemies of His people to imagine themselves to be surrounded in a moment with so many unexpected evils—a large army close at hand, the wrath of Jehovah gone out against them in some terrible manner, and treachery sprung up in the midst of their own camp. So true is it, that by the mere force of terrible thoughts, God can bring destructive judgments upon men.

> How in a moment, suddenly,
> To ruin brought are they!
> With fearful terrors utterly,
> They are consum'd away.

A similar calamity of terrible imaginations was the means of routing a large army of enemies in one of Israel's evil days (2 Kings vii. 6). God's access to the world of a man's thoughts is abundantly set forth in the 139th Psalm; for He who made the human mind must know it in the fullest manner, just as the maker of any machine must know intimately all its parts, and all its capabilities of movement.

Millions of thoughts pass through a man's mind almost every day. Yet not one escapes the eye of God! Sometimes the mind feels oppressed with the number of its own thoughts, but cannot reduce the number. Yet there is an antidote. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul." These thoughts come often unbidden, rushing like a river through the soul.

> "Thoughts on thoughts, a countless throng,
> Rush, chasing countless thoughts along."

These may be all pleasant and refreshing, filling the heart with joy, and spreading the bow of hope over the horizon of the future, as in the case of the two sweet singers in Ps. lxxiii. 23-26, and Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18, also Ps. civ. 34. Or these thoughts may be all gloomy and dreadful, full of foreboding fears and disastrous issues, so that a man may be reduced to the extremity of trouble and be led to cry out, "O save me from my thoughts! for thought kills me." In the midst

of peace and plenty God can sometimes make a wicked man feel the beginnings of future woes by causing "terrible thoughts take hold on him as waters," and surround him on every side; as in the case of Nero, of Voltaire, of Paine, of the French Monarch, who ordered the St. Bartholomew massacre, and many others.

God has a mighty army to attack a man from within, as well as many forces to set in array against him from without. He can also give comfort against all grief on every side by the character of the thoughts which He makes to pass through the mind on any and every occasion.

V. God's dealings always end with tender compassion for His own people.

They may have sinned long against much light, and in the face of much solemn warning and expostulation. Yet He cannot cast away His own. They are His blood-bought property—redeemed at a great price. They are sprinkled with the precious blood of atonement, and though He was angry with them, His anger is turned away, and He uses the language of peace and reconciliation; He forgives their iniquities, and their sins He remembers no more. This people, who had sinned so much, and were ever rebelling against Him, He could not forget were the same people whom He had brought out of Egypt with a high hand, and whom He had graciously been pleased to take into covenant with Himself, and to call Himself by the name of their God. Hence it was for the glory of His unchangeableness, that they should always be loved (Jer. xxxi. 3.) He would show by their history, though it was of a character entirely offensive to His holy nature, that while he might chastise them severely for their manifold backslidings, the mountains were less firm in their places than His pledged love to those whom he had by a fixed agreement taken into tender relations with Himself (Isa. liv. 10.) Indeed, one great purpose he had in view, when electing this people to be for ever His own, was to show how far His love could go, and how tenderly it could manifest itself under the most testing circumstances. Through His dealings with this people, He takes every opportunity of revealing His glorious perfections, the riches of His mercy, the hidings of His power, the depths of His wisdom, the tenderness of His compassion, and the inviolability of His truth and faithfulness (Ezek. xxxvi. 32; Isa. xliii. 21.)

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COMPLETION OF THE LORD'S DELIVERANCE OF HIS PEOPLE.

Verses 1–17.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. **And the men of Ephraim said**, etc.] *i.e.*—after Gideon had reached the trans-Jordanic side of the river, and when the heads of Oreb and Zeeb were brought to him. It may either have been while he was still pursuing the flying foe, or after he had returned from that pursuit; more probably the former. Though the Ephraimites and the Manassites were the descendants of two brothers, and might have been expected to be on the most friendly terms, the former people had long been characterised by a spirit of jealousy lest they should not have that superiority granted them which had all along been predicted of them from the beginning. Had not old Jacob, when blessing the sons of Joseph, set Ephraim before Manasseh? Had not Moses, in his last blessing, spoken of the ten thousands of Ephraim and only of the thousands of Manasseh? Was not Joshua of the tribe of Ephraim? Was not the tabernacle for a long time placed in Shiloh which belonged to the tribe of Ephraim? And, for a long period, were not their numbers very great so as to justify their being regarded as a leading tribe? (Gen. xlviii. 19; Deut. xxxiii. 17; Num. xiii. 8 with Josh. xix. 50; Josh. xviii. 1, etc.). Thus envy became something like a besetting sin of the tribe of Ephraim (Isa. xi. 13; Jud. xii. 1).

Sharply—strong and irritating words. Not that they cared for any part of the booty, but they were most sensitive that they should have the traditional priority conceded to them, and certainly that they should not be left in the background. It was really a question of pride, and, while this is offensive at all times, it was especially so, to introduce it in the midst of the Lord's most solemn deliverance.

2. What have I now done in comparison of you? Most beautiful! Gideon at once concedes the place of honour to them. He is ready to underrate his own doings, when put in comparison with those of the Ephraimites. He knew the sensitive character of the tribe, and where the sting really lay. Hence without arguing the matter, he at once yields the point of their superiority to Manasseh, or rather, with a refinement of delicacy, he will not commit the whole tribe without their consent, but speaks only in name of his own clan, that of Abi-ezer. He uses a proverbial expression, "*Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage (the full crop) of Abi-ezer?*" He at once yields the point which they were most anxious to gain—the acknowledgment of their superiority.

While the proverbial expression employed is susceptible of a general application, probably Gideon's immediate reference was to the signal service which the tribe of Ephraim had just performed. Gideon and his men had but destroyed the rank and file of the enemy, while they had slain the two leading generals of the enemy's army, and doubtless, in doing so, had made a great slaughter of their followers. The first slaughter commenced by Gideon and his men was the vintage, and the smiting down of many afterwards by the Ephraimites, was the gleanings. But these gleanings Gideon was willing to reckon of far greater consequence than all that had been done before, both because the two princes had been slain, and also because an enormous slaughter had been made of the enemy by the tribe of Ephraim (Isa. x. 26).

The grapes.] The word is not in the Hebrew text, and should be omitted. The reading should be, "Is not the gleaning of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer?" [*Pulp. Com.*]

3. Their anger was abated.] *Lit., their spirit was slackened.* "His good words are as victorious as his sword; his pacification of friends better than the execution of enemies." [*Bp. Hall.*]

God hath delivered them into your hands.] Whether they should take it well or not, he is faithful to his God in reminding these proud murmurers that the glory of all the achievements of that memorable day really belonged to God.

4. Faint yet pursuing.] (comp. 1 Sam. xxx. 10). They were exhausted partly from want of sleep, and partly from want of food, and partly from their great exertions in running over a distance of several miles, and contending with the flying enemy all the time. The Sept. adopts the word πεινῶντες but that does not cover the whole meaning. They were both hungry and thirsty, and also greatly fatigued. They were greatly in need of physical nourishment (Job xxii. 7). *Keil* renders it, *exhausted with pursuing;* but the English rendering seems a much happier one, and gives the spirit of the passage better. It was an act of bravery and a work of faith. [*Lias.*] It was more, it was a sacred duty, stern in character, yet imperative in obligation, not to leave a man alive of those who had been guilty of so great a crime, as ruthlessly to despoil God's own vineyard. Not till he had reached the most eastern extremity of Gilead, did this zealous vindicator of the name of his God feel himself at liberty to regard his work as done.

5. Succoth.] *Booths or tents* (Gen. xxxiii. 17). This town was in the tribe of Gad, only a little way south of the point whence the Jordan emerges from the Lake of Gennesareth, and not far from the brook Jabbok.

Loaves.] *Cakes.* Such as might be soon baked, and not occasion any interruption to the pursuit. It was also a modest request. He asked for no fruits or wines, or anything costly. He merely wished the simple necessaries of life. And he gave as his reason that which true Israelites ought to have regarded as the best of all reasons. *I am pursuing after the kings of Midian. i.e.,* I am doing God's work on behalf of His people. I am acting for the public good.

6. Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand?] Instead of showing patriotic sympathy suitable to the occasion, they consulted only their own petty selfish interests. They did not believe, notwithstanding all the wondrous feats of that night and morning, that the kings of Midian were within the grasp of Gideon and his handful of followers. Just as many who stood around the grave of Lazarus, and saw how stern death yielded up his victim at the command of the Lord of life, did not believe in the true character of Jesus, but went their way and told the Pharisees. There are always hardened unbelievers of some kind in the midst of God's mighty doings. These craven-hearted men of Succoth, overlooking the mighty arm of God which had just been laid bare before all eyes against the Midianitish oppressors of His people, still thought it was absurd to think of 15,000 men being at the mercy of 300. They rather thought that these kings would turn on Gideon's men, and swallow them up, in which case it would go hard with themselves, should it become known to the kings that they had succoured the small army of their pursuers. Rather than run the risk of falling out with the enemies of their God and their people, these princes will not move a finger to assist the man whom God was employing to reckon with His enemies, and the enemies of His people.

The reply given was not a bare refusal to grant what every true Israelite should have been forward to give. It was not even the language of common respect, but a scornful taunt. This to a man who was performing a duty on which his God had sent him, was a contempt not so much against the servant as against the master. It was adding insolence to unkindness, and that in the special presence of God. The cowardice was the least of it; it was treason to Israel's God. Compare Nabal's churlishness (1 Sam. xxv. 8-11) and by contrast the conduct of Barzillai (2 Sam. xvii. 27-29; xix. 33-40).

7. Tear your flesh with thorns (Amos i. 3), or thresh your bodies with thorns and briers. It was a cruel mode of putting to death which was practised in these times. "Thorns of the wilderness" meant those that were strong, the desert being the natural ground for yielding thorns and thistles. When captives were thus put to death, the briers and thorns were laid on their naked bodies, and then some heavy implements of husbandry were drawn over them, so crushing them to death. Or sometimes they were whipped, stroke on stroke, with thorns and prickly plants. The Chaldee version has it, "I will mangle your flesh on the thorns, and on the briers." It was an old punishment "to tie the naked body in a bundle of thorns and roll it on the ground" [*Roberts*] (2 Sam. xii. 31; Isa. xli. 15).

The word דּוּשׁ here used means to punish severely.

When the Lord hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand. He does not doubt for a moment but that it shall be so. He is sure of victory, though he has only 300 against 15,000—one man to fifty!

Gideon's threat seems to have made no impression on the men of Succoth. They remained stubborn in their unbelief. "Reproof entereth more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool."

8. Went up thence to Penuel.] A place rendered for ever sacred by the fact, that it was the ground where Jacob their father wrestled with the angel and prevailed (Gen. xxxii. 30, 31) It was a sad indication of degeneracy, when the very ground under their feet spoke of the victory of faith, that they should distrust the God of Jacob, as if he would not be mindful of His covenant! Penuel was higher up towards the mountains than Succoth, which indeed was in the valley. The "tower" was built to repel invaders from the east, who generally came along the course of the Jabbok. It was a town in Gad, and not far from Succoth.

10. Karkor—a town on the eastern frontiers of Gad—as far away as they could get from the Israelitish army, which had now swollen as a river, from the rush of men out of all the tribes. It was the first spot of ground they had reached since the frightful panic they had experienced in Jezreel, where they reckoned themselves safe, for being now almost beyond the boundary line of the country, they did not suppose the Israelites would care to pursue them farther. *The host was secure.* They felt they could now draw breath, and were glad to take some repose, after the terrible trouble through which they had passed.

11. Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents—by the usual route taken by nomads and travellers. He seems to have gone round about somewhat, so as to come upon them from the north-east, which would be a great surprise, and being the season of night, it would renew the terror of the previous night. Not having yet recovered from the panic, they would feel as if new terrors would spring up mysteriously wherever they went, and so they would be unnerved for fighting. They would also very likely be unarmed and laid down to sleep, thus being unprepared for battle. The strength too of Gideon's army would be unknown to them in the darkness, and doubtless they thought it far larger than it really was. But the principal element of weakness was the superstitious dread they had of Gideon and of Gideon's God. A mysterious awe fell upon them in connection with the name Jehovah, and with the name of Gideon as His servant.

12. Discomfited all the host.] Struck terror into them. In the previous verse it is said, *he smote the host*, implying that he put them to death.

He took the two kings of Midian.] Zebah and Zalmunna were the kings proper of Midian. Oreb and Zeeb were but princes, or generals of the army.

13. Returned from battle before the sun rose.] The word *Heres* here translated *the sun*, is used with the same meaning in ch. xiv 18.; comp. Gen. xix. 15, *when the morning arose.*

14 Described unto him the princes of Succoth.] Rather *he wrote down the names of the princes.* Seventy-seven men, so that there would be no mistake in punishing the right persons.

15. Ye did upbraid me.] *Ye loaded me with reproach* as if God could not deliver these kings into my hand. Now behold them!

16. He taught the men of Succoth.] The elders, or chief men יְדַע caused them to know to their cost, or by personal experience. He gave them a severe lesson, viz., what a dangerous thing it was to make light of God's works, or to trifle with the glory of His name. Some think he put them to death, as he did the leading men of Penuel.

17. Beat down the tower.] Their "tower" was their pride. Of that are they first stripped, then of their lives. Gideon was no doubt acting by God's directions in what he did. It was one of the days of the Lord, when He rises up to vindicate the honour of His name, and when every transgression and disobedience receives a due recompense of reward.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 1-17.

I. The hateful character of envy and jealousy.

The view here given of Ephraim's character is humiliating; yet it has two redeeming points. (1) This tribe did respond to the call made to take part in the Lord's deliverance from the presence of the oppressor, and they did materially contribute to the great triumph that was gained over the enemy. For they not only slew Oreb and Zeeb, but they effected a great slaughter of these foreign oppressors at the same time. (2) They did acknowledge Gideon as the captain of the Lord's choosing on the occasion, for it was in obedience to his call that they came forth, and when the victory was gained they presented the heads of the princes to him. These were two important features in a picture here given of Ephraim's character which is otherwise dark. Their conduct forms an unseemly exhibition of envy and jealousy at a solemn moment in the history of the nation. To call it nothing worse, *the moral meanness* of their present action was to their lasting discredit.

1. They cowardly stood aloof in the moment of danger. We do not hear of the slightest movement made in that tribe when Gideon blew the trumpet to summon volunteers to fight the Lord's battle. If they were to be the foremost in wearing the honours they ought to have been the foremost in meeting the dangers. Why did not shame fill their faces that they, the so-called mightiest tribe tarried at home till the victory was won, and then only they bestirred themselves to help their brethren? We should have thought they would come to Gideon on this occasion, with many apologies on their lips, and expressions of regret that they had not acted a more manly and a more loyal part to their God than they did. Yet they chid with Gideon sharply, as if they were the injured parties! "They should rather have cried him up for his valour, and blessed God for his victory."

2. They made little account of Gideon's Divine commission. They overlooked the fact that Gideon was but a child in the hands of his God, and that from first to last all the directions as to the steps that were to be taken were given by Him. This was a more serious blot still. The first particular we have mentioned was but cowardice, but this is to overlook the hand of God. In finding fault with Gideon in this matter they were really complaining of the management of Him who guided Gideon in all his movements.

3. Their only object appeared to be to gratify their own ambition. To do this at any time was a gross breach of good manners, but on such a day as this was for Israel, and in the presence of such striking proofs of God's gracious return to His people, who had so long been lying under the heel of the oppressors, was at once infamous and wicked. Their sense of God's honour was unspeakably small, and their desire for exalting themselves to honour was all-absorbing.

4. They sought their honours at the most serious risk. Had they not found in Gideon a man of great moderation, meek as regards his own rights, and forbearing as regards the conduct of others, a fire might now have been kindled in Israel itself at the very critical moment, when the enemy was yet

only partially routed, and the danger was not all past. Thus the work in which God Himself was taking part might have been marred, and a new evil of civil war might have sprung up in Israel, equally if not more disastrous than that which they had with Midian.

5. Envy is one of many sister evils. Pride, jealousy, and envy, especially go together. Pride, indeed, was the first sin—the aspiring to be a god. From this a whole brood of sins spring, and all have a remarkable family likeness. But the parent is pride, which really means making self the most important of all things, and a desire that all things should become subordinate to self. The true balance of things which God has established is that, while every man should cherish self-respect, he is not to over-value himself, as being a dependent creature, and occupying a certain position which God in His providence has assigned to him.

The evil of this sin is seen, in that it thrust proud Nebuchadnezzar out of *men's* society, proud Saul out of his kingdom, proud Haman out of court, proud Adam out of paradise, and proud Lucifer out of heaven. [*H. Smith.*]

Remember what thou wert before the truth—nothing; what thou wert for many years after—weakness; what in all thy life—a great sinner; what in all thy excellencies—a mere debtor to God, to thy parents, to the earth, to all the creatures. Surely nothing is more reasonable than to be humble, and nothing more foolish than to be proud. [*Taylor.*]

What is a man proud of—money? It will not procure for him one night's sleep. It will not buy him back a lost friend. It will not bribe off approaching death. Land? a little bit of it will soon be all he will require. Learning? if he be equal to Newton, he has gathered one little pebble on the ocean's shore, and even that one he must soon lay down again. [*S. T. Treasury.*]

Those trees bend the most freely which bear the most fully. As a proud heart loves none but itself, so it is beloved by none but itself. Who would attempt to gain those pinnacles, that none have ascended without fears, or descended without falls? Where the river is deepest, the water glides the most smoothly. Empty casks sound most, whereas the well-filled vessel silences its own sound. As the shadow of the sun is largest when his beams are lowest, so we are always least when we make ourselves the greatest. [*Secker.*]

Pride is an evil that puts men upon all manner of evils. Accius the poet, though a dwarf, yet would be pictured as tall of stature. Psaphon, a proud Libyan, would needs be a god, and having caught some birds, he taught them to prattle "the great god, Psaphon." Menecrates, a proud physician, wrote thus to King Philip: Menecrates, a god, to Philip, a king. Proud Simon, in Lucian, having got a little wealth changed his name from Simon to Simonides, because there were so many beggars of his kin; he also set the house on fire where he was born, that no one might point to it. [*Brooks.*]

The demon of Pride was born with us, and it will not die one hour before us. It is so woven into the very warp and woof of our nature, that till we are wrapped in our winding-sheets we shall never hear the last of it. [*Spurgeon*]

Like a snake coiled up in a bed of flowers, there is danger lurking under our fairest attainments; like the inflammatory attack, to which those are most liable who are highest fed, whose bones are full of marrow, and whose veins are gorged with blood, so we may be exposed to spiritual pride through the very fulness of our graces; therefore we ought to watch and pray against the great evil, and study to be humble. [*Guthrie.*]

A minister who on a certain occasion had preached ably and well, at the close of the service was accosted by a hearer with the exclamation, "That was a noble sermon, sir," "Yes," was the reply, "the devil told me that before I left the pulpit."

6. **Envy is an intolerant evil.** "Who can stand before it?" It grieves that others should possess the good in which it does not share. It fired the breast of Saul, and he cast a javelin at David. It rankled in the bosoms of Joseph's brethren, and they first cast him into a pit, and then sold him for a slave to strangers. It inflamed the mind of the wicked Cain so that he rose against his brother and slew him. It burned along with pride in the heart of Haman, and moved him to seek the death, not only of Mordecai, but of the whole race to which he belonged. It grudges even to give that to a man which he has fairly earned by his skill and toil (Eccl. iv. 4). It refuses even to the closest friends the slightest superiority over one's self, though it is the Master himself who confers it (Matt. xx. 24). From its envenomed assaults the best of men are not exempted (1 Sam. xvii. 28). It is one of those "roots of bitterness" from which spring "strifes, railings, evil surmisings, and perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds."

II. The nobility of meek forbearance under false accusation.

What a refreshing contrast have we in the bearing of Gideon to that of the men of Ephraim! His spirit is calm and morally great, beautifully illustrative of Prov. xvi. 32. He stands before us like a giant in the midst of peevish children.

1. **He refrains from recrimination.** He not only had ground for self vindication, but it belonged rather to him to find fault with his accusers. Why did not the men of Ephraim come forward of themselves long ago, and take the lead in rescuing the country from oppression? Why did they need to be called for at all to take part in such a work? There was no refusal of volunteers for such a cause, and why come in now to raise heart-burnings in the very midst of a solemn Divine interposition on behalf of the sacred nation, when they ought as one man to be prostrating themselves in the dust before Jehovah, and pouring out their gratitude from penitent hearts at the deliverance of their land from the incubus of oppression? But this true man of God refrains from rebuke. He knew that, however strong his case, that course would lead to strife (comp. 2 Sam. xix. 41-43). He therefore wisely left off contention before meddling with it.

2. **He had regard to the great interests that were in his hands.** It was the moment of Israel's redemption, when everything depended on union among themselves. To have got into strife now would have been a suicidal policy for the best interests of the country. It might have led to civil war, and plunged Israel into a deeper distress than that out of which they were just emerging. Besides, Gideon felt that he occupied the sacred position of being in God's employment, His servant appointed to carry into execution a great work. All controversy among themselves, therefore, was not to be thought of, but gratitude and praise he felt should absorb all their attention. It was these things present to his mind that formed the basis of the answer which he gave. Public considerations, not personal; God's presence, and God's authority over him; God's cause, and Israel's salvation—these were the grounds on which Gideon made his noble reply.

3. **He yields the place of honour to those who accuse him** (Phil. ii. 3). "What have I done compared with what you have done? To you be the larger share of merit. If I have been first in the field, your gleaning has been more than my vintage. God has given to me to break up the enemy's camp, but to you He has given the heads of two of the principal leaders in that great army

along with a great slaughter of the rank and file. What have I done to compare with you?" Here is an instance of the spirit that prefers another in honour to one's self. He gives up his own claims in a moment, when he finds that they might prove an offence to those around him. No man was more humble of all that fought that day than was Gideon. From the shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people in moral greatness. He that ruled in Israel was willing to take the lowest place. He proves twice a conqueror, first over the hosts of Midian, and then more signally still over himself! The Macedonian monarch conquered the world, but entirely failed to subdue himself. The Bible great man is immeasurably superior to the world's hero. The one affords a living illustration of "whatsoever things are just, pure, lovely, and of good report." The other illustrates the case of a man sinking to the level of the brute, acting like a savage to those around him, and at last dying the death of a debauchee. If Gideon is a picture of moral greatness, then this is a picture of moral infamy; and to set it upon a throne is to hold it up to the scorn and reprobation of all time!

4. **The spirit which he showed entirely pacified the fault-finders.** "Their anger was abated when he said that." How forcible are right words! Nothing more wise could have come from one who had a large knowledge of human nature. He put his finger on the spot where the soreness was felt, and poured on it the most soothing of oils, which at once produced the desired effect. "A soft tongue breaketh the bone." "A soft answer turneth away wrath." It was as if some spirit—perhaps that good angel that called him to this work and inspired him in it—had whispered in his ear the words which He long afterwards spake through a New Testament apostle. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourself, but rather give place unto wrath." On this principle he acted, and so "overcame evil with good, and poured coals of fire on the fault-finders' heads." All men of right judgment while they look on, involuntarily exclaim, "The righteous man is more excellent than his neighbour."

The practical good done to Israel was incalculably great. The spark was burning dangerously close to the tinder, and frightfully destructive must have been the explosion, had not a firm foot been instantly put down to extinguish it. A bitter internecine war was prevented just in time, which might have cost the lives of many thousands of the sons of his people, have kindled a spirit of deep hostility among brethren, and have perpetuated feelings of jealousy and malice for many generations. On Gideon's brow this day was written in letters of white the motto—"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." He acted from the force of moral principle, to gain precious and Divine ends, and his name shall not die from the page of true fame. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

III. The condition of success in God's service.

A great work was now being done for God. An enemy had bidden defiance to the God of heaven, had blasphemed His name, and not only wantonly touched, but threatened to extinguish the people whom He had taken into covenant with Himself, and who kept up the knowledge of His name on the earth. For that enemy the day of reckoning was now come. He must be destroyed, and that utterly. The jealousy of Jehovah for His own great name was now awakened. Gideon and his 300 men were the instruments chosen to fulfil the sentence of Heaven on these rebellious ones; and till the work was finished, not a man was at liberty to retire from his post. Though they were all in greater or less degree overcome with fatigue, from long fighting, want of sleep, want of food, and running over many miles of ground, yet they must not relax their efforts

The sacred call of their God was to persevere till their work was done. Thus only could success be legitimately won. It is in this condition that we now find Gideon and his 300 men (ver. 4) "faint, yet pursuing."

These words contain *a Paradox*. Those who fight the Lord's battles often faint, and yet they pursue. They are overcome, and yet prove victorious—their strength is gone, and yet they are more than a match for the foe—they are "cast down, but not destroyed"—the cedars become reeds, and yet are able to weather the storm—the confessedly faint do the work of heroes—each can say, "When I am weak then am I strong"—and can add in explanation, "By *Thee* have I run through a troop; by my God do I leap over a wall." Or, in New Testament phrase, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me."

Here an important principle is laid down for those who would enter into God's service. It relates to the condition on which success is to be gained. *Even when strength is exhausted, there must be the resolution to persevere.* Wearied and weak, with small visible resources, while difficulties and dangers are numerous and formidable, the true worker for God must resolutely persevere. He is allowed to think only of victory—never of defeat. Even should his arm become feeble, and he be scarcely able to drag his limbs along, he must ever keep his face to the foe, and assume the certainty of his being a conqueror in the end.

The idea is not simply that of *perseverance, but perseverance when human wisdom can see no natural means of holding out any longer.* These men had fought till they could fight no more. Yet they followed on, implicitly obedient to the call of Divinely-appointed duty. Though the requirement of rest and refreshment was imperative, the fear of God was upon their spirits, and not a murmur of complaint was heard along their ranks. There was no call for substitutes to take their places, which could easily have been done. The rule was distinct—"By these three hundred will I save you . . . . and let all the other people go every man unto his place" (vii. 7). By them alone they knew the work must be done.

This rule is of general application; for the principles which apply to any one work of God apply to all, and in every age, regard only being had to the change of circumstances. For general use the following particulars are to be noticed:—

1. The condition of success itself—what it is. It implies—

(1.) *Every atom of strength must be put forth.* Every muscle and bone in his body must be given. Not a drop of blood in his veins must be withheld. Nerves and sinews, all that hands and feet can do, must be absolutely surrendered. It is not enough that there should be a little zeal and some honest work done, or that some great efforts be made, and a man show himself to be in earnest, but a man's whole being must be given up to the service of his God when the call is given. This, indeed, is simply coming up to the measure of what is reasonable, for we owe to God our whole selves—every faculty we have, and its fullest exercise. He may seldom require us to strain our energies in His service, but absolute dedication to Him of all we are, and have, is simply His just due, so that we are always to hold ourselves in readiness to offer to Him the exercise of our faculties, to any degree that He may require.

Thus as regards work. As to suffering, our Saviour himself is an example of the absolute surrender of every limb and sensitive part, when that is required to illustrate the deep designs of God's moral government. He submitted to be "poured out like water and to have all His bones out of joint—His heart made like wax, and melted in the midst of His bowels; His strength dried like a potsherd, and brought down to the dust of death" (Ps. xxii. 14, 15).

All this is greatly intensified, when we think that our life, which was forfeited by sin, has been given to us anew as the purchase of the blood of God's own Son.

(2.) *When strength is exhausted the fight must be continued by faith.* When our resources are exhausted, and the work is not done, we are still to believe that God's resources can never fail, and that, if the work in hand is really for His glory, and needful to be done, it shall be done without fail, sooner or later, as to time, and in the manner which He sees to be best as to means. To carry on the fight by faith is most glorifying to God, because it trusts His power to bring out the issue though the steps are not seen; it trusts His wisdom to find out the means; and it trusts His faithfulness, that He will never make light of His word of promise. The dependence of the creature on the fountain head is more distinctly seen, and seen to be absolute; while gratitude flows in a purer form, and from a deeper well-spring in the heart (Isa. xxvi. 4; Gen. xviii. 14; Ps. cxlvii. 5; Prov. xv. 11; Num. xxiii. 19). Hence we often find that though God does not despise the use of a man's natural faculties, for they are His own gift, yet He often blocks up our way that we may see what a short way one can travel when left to themselves, and how necessary it is to keep close to Hi who has said, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be," and who always keeps His word (Isa. xl. 30, 31).

(3.) *We must never lose the hope of victory.* The true soldier in God's service must assume that he is invincible while doing God's work faithfully and from right motives. To suppose failure would be to distrust Omnipotence, or to suppose that a Divine promise could be broken. When God undertakes a work it cannot prove abortive. He is the "Lord of hosts, mighty in battle" (Ps. xlviii. 1, etc.; Job. ix. 4; Ps. ix. 19, 20; Deut. xxxii. 30; Isa. xlvi. 9, 10). Yet, notwithstanding all assurances, faith is often weak and gives way. Even the conqueror of Goliath, when wearied out with perpetual harassment, gave way to despondency, and said "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should escape into the land of the Philistines." A sad illustration of the weakness of faith on the part of one who had been solemnly taken under the protection of the God of Israel, through his being anointed with the holy oil, and who had already for several years been marvellously delivered from the malicious designs made on his life by a blood-thirsty man.

(4.) *We must endure every possible hardship for the cause of God.* Gideon's men of faith had to fight all the night long without intermission, without sleep or refreshment, and to travel laboriously over hill and dale for many a weary mile, while they cheerfully submitted to the lines marked out for them. They were required not to "confer with flesh and blood," but rather to "crucify the flesh" when it was necessary to serve the ends of high principle (Heb. xi. 36, 37; comp. Acts ix. 16; xxi. 13). Love of our own ease must never exceed our love to the Saviour, or to the cause of our God. We dare not take up the cause of religion merely when it is comfortable, but turn aside when we meet with briers and thorns. Pliable could say, "come on, brother, let us mend our pace," so long as his ear was soothed with pleasant talk about the crowns and sceptres of the better land on high; but when the Slough of Despond came in his way, he very quickly turned his back on the christian pilgrimage. The man that is wanted for God's service must work on, even when he begins to faint, must keep to his oars even when he goes against the stream, and must go resolutely forward even when there is a lion in the way. A true servant of our Divine Master must be content to bear a real cross for His sake, never to keep back from duty through fear of man, or dread of the world's scorn, but at all times to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

(5.) *We must never give up till the work is done.* It was not enough for Gideon to read the enemy a lesson by crippling his strength and scattering his army. All the members of that proud host had been guilty of a capital crime, and must have the sentence of death executed upon them in the day of the Lord, when judgment was being laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet. Gideon's commission was to "smite the Midianites as one man" (ch. vi. 16). Their sin in despising the God of Israel was very offensive. All had been guilty, and all must perish, for now the Divine jealousy was awakened. So it was in other cases (Deut. xx. 16-18; xxv. 17-19; Josh. xi. 20; 1 Sam. xv. 3).

2. **The difficulty of complying with this condition.** Because "fainting" is so frequent an experience of those who are resolved to persevere at the line of duty. This arises from—

(1.) *The weakness of the natural faculties.* "We are dust." "Our spirits dwell in houses of clay, and we are crushed before the moth." "All flesh is grass." Many of those who are enrolled in God's service are "bruised reeds." None can say—"My strength is the strength of stones, and my flesh is of brass." How is it to be expected that such persons should persevere when real difficulties in the way of duty arise? The most intrepid soldier sometimes trembles; the most robust labourer is not always free from languor; the soul of the most persevering pilgrim is oftentimes "much discouraged because of the way." So in the discharge of the duties which every good man has before him in his place, partly through their toilsome character, partly through their multitude, and partly through their long continuance; his strength fails, his spirit droops, and he feels utterly unequal to the work set before him. "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

(2.) *The small success which crowns great efforts.* This produces fainting. "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought." "We have toiled all the night and caught nothing." "We have borne the burden and heat of the day," and only earned a penny. Sometimes the Missionary has but a single convert after years of sacrifice and privation. The Christian Minister, with the most indefatigable toil, can barely keep up his small number of adherents. The Christian Teacher of the young cannot sometimes point to a single case of a striking conversion.

(3.) *The opposition of those who know not God.* There are still outside the Christian city the Sanballats the (Horonite), and the Geshems the (Arabian), to hinder those who would build the walls of Jerusalem, and the race is scarcely less numerous than of old. Moses met with them in the Egyptian magicians; Hezekiah, in the blaspheming Sennacherib; Daniel, in the princes and presidents set over the kingdom of Darius; Paul, in Elymas the sorcerer, and in Alexander the coppersmith, who did him much evil. The advocates of gospel truth still meet with them in those who would exalt reason so as to destroy faith; in those who would magnify charity so as to efface the distinctions of moral character; and in those who would stretch out liberty, until it become all one with laxity. There are many who openly oppose, and there are still more who would secretly undermine, the pillar of gospel truth. No wonder, if those who are in charge of the building of Sion's walls, should oftentimes find their hearts giving way, and their souls fainting within them.

(4.) *The hanging back of those who ought to be friends.* Nothing is more helpful to the Christian cause than the warm sympathy, and timely aid of true fearers of the Lord. How greatly was Paul comforted by the coming of Titus on one occasion (2 Cor. vii. 5, 6); and how much were his hands strengthened and his spirit cheered by such true yoke-fellows as Timothy and Epaphroditus on another occasion (Phil. ii. 19, 20 and 27). But how many hung back.

Demas, who loved this present world; Hymeneus and Alexander, who made shipwreck of the faith; Phyletus, Phygellus and Hermogenes, with nearly all that were in Asia, who left their spiritual teacher (2 Tim. iv. 10; 1 Tim. i. 20; ii. 17; 2 Tim. i. 15), and a large number undefined (Phil. ii. 21). How much greater would have been the success that crowned the efforts of the Apostles, if those who at first did run well had continued true to the end!

(5.) *The stream of circumstances is often against us.* It might be supposed to be otherwise, when the cause is God's own, and His glory is concerned in its progress. Having all events at His disposal, why should not the Ruler of Providence arrange, so that the stream should ever flow in favour of the truth. Yet the balance of circumstances seems much rather to favour its enemies than its friends. So many occurrences are happening to hinder the cause of Christ, so many disappointments take place when there was a fair hope of success, breaches of engagements happen, rival competitors step in, the interests of selfishness come into collision with those of God and His cause, changes of opinion, and still worse, changes of feeling among friends are ever occurring, we are constantly being surrounded by new conditions of life, old friends pass away, and new friends are with difficulty made, strifes and divisions arise, and the gospel chariot is beset with hindrance on all sides.

(6) *Anxieties as to the issue of our efforts.* This also leads to fainting, as they are long continued. This anxiety is greater or less as natural fear gets the better of faith. This, however, has in it more of weakness than of unbelief. The timid spirit exclaims—"Who shall roll us away the stone?" But strong faith calls out—"Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." The Israelites of Ezekiel's days gave up the cause of God among them as lost. The life seemed to have gone out of the Church, and in their own minds they were likening themselves to a multitude of dry bones, which no preaching could put life into. "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts." But God, by His prophet, shows them that when the "wind" comes, along with the prophesying, the bones come together, and they stand upon their feet an exceeding great army (Ezek. xxxvii. 11).

(7.) *Struggles with indwelling sin* (Habak. i. 2). "O, wretched man, etc." (Rom. vii. 24). Sin is ever destructive of strength. It produces the hiding of God's countenance, and so cuts off the soul from the supply of its strength. No calamity is so great as to lose the shining of that countenance. How earnestly do those pray for the help of that countenance who know from experience its value (Ps. lxxx. 3; xlii. 5; li. 12; Ex. xxxiii. 18; Ps. iv. 6, 7). But there is only trouble when that countenance is hid (Ps. xxx. 7; Isa. xl. 27). Sin produces fear, and so unhinges every faculty. The soul cannot act with the firmness and resolution of one who has well-grounded hope, but is more than half paralysed at the thought that all things are against it. Sin acts like an incubus of mysterious weight upon the soul, crushing it down irresistibly (Ps. xxxviii. 4; xxxii. 3, 4; xxxix. 10).

From all these and many similar causes, it is a frequent experience on the part of those who are engaged in any service for God, to faint in the fulfilment of their duty. Yet the rule is that though faint, they must be determined to persevere.

3 High purposes are served by this arrangement.

(1.) *It shows the worth of the cause in which God's workers are engaged.* The excellence of the cause is to be estimated by what is paid for its maintenance. Here every atom of a man's strength is first required. To that is to be added his faith, that God will put forth the resources of o nipotence, in so far as that is needed, to make the work a perfect work. The work is supposed to

be so sacred that nothing must be wanting that man, the instrument, or God, the worker, can do to have the end accomplished. That end is really the honour of God's great name. For this the universe arose; for this it stands. The glory of the heavens above, and of the earth around, is the glory of Him who made them. This is the one end of all existence, and the only supreme object for which man lives. Hence all the toil and sacrifice of which a man's nature is susceptible, is not too much to give for the keeping up of the honour of the Divine name. To require this of a man shows the tribute of reverence which is due.

(2.) *It is a test of loyalty to their God.* This condition imposed on Gideon's men showed how far they were willing to go in fidelity to Him whom they accepted as their God. Were they resolved that nothing whatever would turn them from their allegiance? The taunts and sneers of their fellows, the ease and rest which they would have secured, had they obtained substitutes to finish the work which they had begun, the trials arising from hunger and thirst, exposure and weariness, from which they intensely suffered, all were insufficient to make them depart by a single hairbreadth from the prescribed path of duty. The word of their God was more sacred to them than their life was dear, and they were prepared to die at their post, rather than show slackness in their reverence, or fail to carry it out both in letter and spirit. Their language was—it is not necessary for us to live; it is essential that we be loyal to our God.

Similar examples—Paul (Acts xxi. 13), Job (ch. xiii. 15), Peter and the disciples (Matt. xix. 27–29), Jonathan (1 Sam. xiv.), Mary, in choosing the teaching of Jesus as the "one thing needful" (Luke x. 41, 42).

(3.) *It illustrates the power of God's grace in sustaining those men in their heroic resolution.* There was more than natural courage, and power of natural endurance in that splendid example of self-sacrifice. There was an illustration given of what Divine grace could do, to sustain the soul under a great trial. Who could deny that the Spirit of the Lord came upon them as upon Gideon (vi. 34), for they shared with him in the doing of this work, so that they needed in some measure the same qualifications. The very fact that they were chosen specially by God Himself for the work implied, that from Him they would receive the qualifications needed (vii. 5-7).

On this needful sustaining grace, all who have any work to do in God's service may at all times count. The constant assurance is, "I am with thee. I will not fail thee. My grace is sufficient for thee." It gives victory over "the wicked one" in all that he can do (Luke x. 19; Eph. vi. 16; 1 John v. 18; Rom. xvi. 20) victory over the world (1 John v. 4; John xvi. 33); victory over indwelling corruption; which is in some sense the greatest victory of all, for nothing so hinders the doing of any work for God as the working of sin in the heart. Sin is essentially a rebellion against God, and kills the spirit of obedience. It draws harsh inferences from God's arrangements, and leads to the cherishing of hard thoughts about God's character and ways. Yet Divine grace can make the spark of spiritual life exist in the soul amid a sea of corruption, and though it only glimmers like a feeble taper, it must continue to burn, notwithstanding all the rough winds that blow upon it from every side.

But where this seed of the new life exists in the heart, it must show itself in good works in the life to some extent. At any moment too, through some special quickening of God's grace, there is provision for enabling a man to persevere in the doing of God's work, even though he is at the point of fainting.

(4.) *This arrangement furnishes strong cases of unswerving fidelity to God and His cause.* Strong cases are needed to show to what heights true piety can reach. The garden of the Lord not only has its many specimens of little flowers, tender saplings, and all the ordinary growths, but there must also be the noble

elms, the tall cedars, and the majestic oaks. So also in the Christian church, there must not only be the children, the feeble, and the mass of the inexperienced, and the undisciplined, but also some types of the strong, the mature, and those of princely features. There must be those who can represent the Christian character to advantage. One such case as we have here is worth more than a hundred, or even a thousand examples of the ordinary type. In regard to these latter cases, little impression is made on the world by them. They differ so little from the world's own type of a devoted character. But these noble 300 are all of a class whom the world cannot match, before whom it bows and confesses its marked inferiority. Here are a handful of men absolutely overcome with fatigue, only 300 in number, all told, pursuing an army still 15,000 strong. They are parched with thirst, and famishing for want of food, while they have several miles to traverse on foot, ere they reach the enemy. They are all faint as regards their bodily condition, though not one of them is faint in spirit. They have still to fight against fifty times their number, but now they are utterly exhausted and wearied out, whereas then they were fresh and vigorous, so that in reality they were now fighting a more unequal battle than at first, when they had to face a foe nine times multiplied in number. Faith had need to be strong indeed, that could take victory for certain, under such circumstances as these. Truly, "these elders by faith obtained a good report."

(5.) *The creature's insufficiency without Divine aid must be shown.* When human resources dry up like the wady in the desert, and can no farther go, then is brought out the incomparable superiority of the ocean with its exhaustless fulness.

4. Great encouragements to persevere.

(1.) *The constant presence of the Captain of Salvation.* "Lo, I am with you always." He was with His people when they were suffering in the iron furnace of Egypt earnestly looking on, for it was the members of His body that were suffering. "He was with the Church in the wilderness," to protect and lead them; and, in every period of that remarkable history, His presence was made known as the Saviour of His redeemed ones, at one time "taking them by the arms teaching them how to go," at another, "bearing them as on eagles' wings," and on a third occasion, rising up as a wall of fire round about them. They are sacred to Him, one and all, as those who are purchased by His blood, and whom He has received in charge to bring home in due time to glory. He utters all in one word when He says, "I will never leave—never, never forsake thee" (Is. liv. 10).

(2.) *Divine assurance is given of victory.* "I will contend with him that contendeth with thee." "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, for thou shalt thresh the mountains," etc. (see Is. xli. 14, 15, also 10). The enemy at most shall only be able to bruise the heel; thou shalt bruise his head. On this occasion, not one of the 300 men fell down slain; nay, not one of them was wounded. God was "a covering to their head in the day of battle." "A thousand fell by their side, and ten thousand at their right hand, yet to them it did not come nigh; for the Eternal God was their refuge, and underneath them were the everlasting arms." Not a hair of their heads was touched. It was special, as when at the exodus from the land of bondage "there was not one feeble person in all their tribes" (Ps. cv. 37). "Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. xvi. 25). Nothing is more uncertain, in most cases, than the issue of a battle. Napoleon said at the battle of Waterloo, "By all the rules of war I ought to have won, but my good genius forsook me." But all who serve under a greater commander will without fail be able to finish by saying, "We are more than conquerors through Him that loveth us."

"The weakest saint shall win the day,
Though earth and hell oppose the way."

(3.) *The good man is already begun to be victorious.* He is faint, but not down. He is so far from being vanquished, that he is already "pursuing." The tide of battle is turned in his favour, and ere long the field will be his own. The enemy's ranks are broken, and he is a retreating foe. The Captain of Salvation has borne the brunt of the contest, and has decided the day; all that remains for His followers, is to follow up the victory. The soldier of Christ often fails to see that the position is won, for he feels himself grappling with circumstances that threaten to overmaster him, and with influences that are ever throwing him back rather than forward. Forces and events come upon him which are too mighty for his unaided strength, so that he is continually made to say, "O! when shall this terrible struggle have an end!" He is like a straw among the giant billows. But all is meant to teach the lesson of absolute reliance on his Saviour God, to bring him through the conflict. The rule is, that where Christ has already overcome, all His people must overcome after Him (John xiv. 19; xvi. 33; Rom. vi. 14, 4, 6; Rom. xvi. 20).

4. *Many others have fought and overcome in the service of God.* All the good from Abel and Abraham downward to the present hour. Many have passed through a hard struggle, but there has been only one termination in the end. "This is the Father's will . . . that I should lose nothing" (John vi. 39). The twelve times twelve thousand who were sealed in Rev. vii., before passing through the great convulsions recorded in subsequent chapters, all re-appear as the complete number of 144,000 (not a single unit awanting) standing with the Lamb, safe and joyful, on the heights of Mount Sion, free for ever from all the assaults of enemies, in chap. xiv.

5. *The reward of God's service is unspeakably great.* The world's hero has for his prize wealth, honours, high station, a name on the page of history, an ovation from the multitude when he appears in public, perhaps a monument to tell to the future world his victorious deeds. Yet all that is but the applause of perishing men. The faithful good-doer in the service of God shall be received into the country of sinless perfection as his home, shall wear an incorruptible crown, shall have angels for his companions and ministering spirits, shall stand for ever in the presence of his Lord, shall receive robes, palms, sceptres, and harps from His royal hand, and shall rejoice for ever in His gracious smile.

5. Applications of this rule.

(1.) *To the church of God collectively,* in the great work of keeping up a standard for God's truth in the world, and extending it to the ends of the earth. God's servants are often "weary and faint in their minds" while endeavouring to fulfil this responsible duty; yet, though surrounded with dark clouds, and disheartened a thousand times, their resolution must be to persevere.

(2.) *To any particular church or congregation,* whose duty it is to shine as a light, holding forth the lamp of the Gospel to dispel the darkness of error and sin, and to persevere in doing so, even if the flame should be blown out by cold easterly winds, and nothing be left but "smoking flax."

(3.) *To any pious man who embraces opportunities for working among the ungodly,* and who tries in the strength of his God to turn the wilderness around him into a fruitful field, but who finds the soil to be very hard, so that his work resembles that of boring through solid rock; yet, though baffled many times, he must not give up, but continue his efforts, hoping on against hope, and laying hold of promised Divine resources, and at last a great success shall come. The exhaustion of his own resources, while there is nothing but failure, proves all the more distinctly the need of prayer and the exercise of faith.

(4.) *To all individual workers in the Church*—to Christian ministers, to standard-bearers and office-bearers, to teachers, benevolent agents, conductors

of prayer meetings, spiritual advisers, messengers of comfort, and good-doers of every class in the church as in the garden, in contrast with the open field whose aim is not only to bring in, but to build up, to nourish, to lead on, to counsel and warn, to stimulate and cheer, to admonish and to encourage. Though, both with the evangelist and the instructor, the work proceeds but slowly, and "all day long" they complain that "they have stretched out their hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people," yet the motto ever is Though faint, still pursue.

(5.) *To every good man who strives to live a consistently righteous life in an ungodly world.* He has constant sacrifices to make for the sake of righteous principle, living among those who know no such principle, or who practically disregard it. His worldly interest suffers, he is assailed with sneers and reproaches, he has to count on the world's ill-will and persecution, and he has to fight his battles for the most part alone, except such help as he gets from the Divine countenance smiling upon him. Yet, though "rivers of waters run down his eyes while men do not keep God's law," and though he often raises the complaint, "Woe is me that I dwell in Mesech," &c., he must ever resolve to pursue.

(6.) *To the fearer of God in carrying on the work of his personal sanctification.* While the work of Christ secures to every one who rests on it a complete *title* to heaven, a change of personal character is not less necessary to secure *fitness* for that holy world. Every expectant of heavenly bliss is called upon therefore to "*work out* his salvation with fear and trembling, for God worketh in him" (comp. 2 Cor. vii. 1, and 1 John iii. 3). "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." He must become "conformed to the image of God's Son, and so made meet to become a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light." To get this work accomplished requires time, many wrestlings in prayer, much diligence in the use of the means of grace, and much of the Holy Spirit's influences to work on the heart; yet all the while, he "sees a law in the members warring against the law of the mind," &c. He is faint with struggling against the native depravity of the heart, and yet as the condition of success he must persevere.

Brevities on Perseverance.—One may go far after he is tired—*French.* Perseverance is rather a state of standing still than going on; perseverance kills the game—*Spanish.* "Hard pounding, gentlemen; but we will see who can pound the longest"—*Wellington at Waterloo.* It was perseverance that made Newton, Columbus, Washington, Stephenson, Wilberforce what they were. *Perseverando vinces* is a time-honoured motto.

IV. The blindness and obduracy of unbelief.

Blindness of mind and hardness of heart always go together. Those who remained deaf to all God's pleadings with His people in every age are generally said to be a "people of no understanding." The men who came around the Saviour during His public ministry, and saw most of His mighty works, still remained unconvinced to the end of His Divine character. After they had seen all, they spoke as if they had seen nothing; and near the close of His ministry, they still put the question, "What sign showest thou that we may believe?" "Having eyes they did not see, neither did they understand."

It is the same here. These men of the tribe of Gad, whose ancestors in the days of Deborah "abode among the sheepfolds" rather than step forward with their brethren to the "help of the Lord against the mighty," now show themselves utterly unconcerned about the great deliverance which the God of Israel was working out for His people with a high hand and a stretched out arm. The

mighty fact which smote on the ears of men with the force of thunder, that in one night 120,000 of the dead bodies of Israel's enemies were scattered all the way from Jezreel to the banks of the Jordan and beyond it, seemed to make no impression on these callous-hearted men of Succoth and Penuel. They could not discern from this stupendous fact, that this was the hour of Jehovah's jealousy for the honour of His name, and of His indignation against the oppressors of His people.

They were thus blind because they would not see. They had long been living in the habit of rejecting the God of Israel, for we scarcely ever hear of any revival of the old spirit of loyalty to the God of the Covenant (chap. v. 17) on the eastern banks of the Jordan up to this period.* They seem to have settled down into a chronic state of apostacy, and had become stone blind to all spiritual interpretations of the events of Divine providence. Their hearts were in their pastures and their flocks. They "loved this present world, and the love of the Father was not in them." The flash of light thrown upon their characters by Gideon's brief interview with them revealed that.

1. *They did not see God's hand in what was passing before their eyes.*
2. *They were callously ungrateful for the solemn deliverance wrought by the Divine hand.*
3. *They stubbornly refused when called upon to take any hand in helping on God's great work.*
4. *They measured the issues of the case by sight and not by faith.*

No wonder that such obstinacy of unbelief should become a mark for the outpouring of the Divine indignation.

V. The stern character of Old Testament punishments.

Admitting that the daring impiety of these men of Succoth and Penuel was eminently provocative of the Divine anger, there is an aspect of severity in the punishment to which they were subjected, as compared with the dealings in criminal cases in New Testament times. We hear of no formal indictment drawn out against the evil doers, no jury is empanelled, no witnesses are summoned, no evidence is led, no impersonation of the law sits in the place of judgment to keep the balance even, and there is no passing of a judicial sentence founded on the evidence presented. The one moment records the act of irreverence shown to the God of Israel, the next moment tells of the sentence swift and irremediable, which is to fall on the heads of the guilty. Where God himself is judge, and where conscience is at work, roused from its sleep, there is no need for any forms of law.

But why such severity of punishment? For doubtless Gideon did not now give way merely to a feeling of personal revenge. The moment was too solemn for that. In this, as in all else that he did, in conducting this sacred transaction in the service of His God, he would be guided by the secret directions of that Spirit of God that rested upon him till his work was done. We fear that the aggravated evil of the sin is not sufficiently appreciated by those who imagine there is too much rigour in the sentence inflicted. All sin deserves death; and for daring and defiant sin to God's own face, it is fit that there should be a special sting in the penalty to correspond with the sting in the sin. It is farther to be remembered that this was one of the "days of the Lord," when "judgment is laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet," in order to show, on the one hand, what is due to the majesty and holiness of God, and on the other what is due to the evil of sin (see pp. 296, 297).

* Gilead means Gad and a portion of Manasseh (p. 283.)

The difference of tone and attitude in the Divine dealings with sin under the Old and under the New Testament Dispensations is specially to be noticed. Under the former, there had been as yet no public standard vindication made of God's claims on His rebellious creatures, so that an aspect of severity in enforcing these claims was absolutely necessary. Now that the Lamb of God has been laid on the altar, and the great propitiation has been made, the jealous God becomes "the God of peace," and He speaks of repentance and pardon through the blood of Christ (p. 165, also 163–4, 138–9, 378–9).

CHAPTER VIII.

FINAL DEALING WITH THE ENEMY—GIDEON'S LAST DAYS.

Verses 18–35.

CRITICAL NOTES.—18. **Then said he, etc.**] This must have taken place when Gideon arrived at home; for it was after his return to Penuel and Succoth, and the boy Jether was present, who could not have been in the battlefield. It may have been on the old battleground in Jezreel where the people would come flocking to see the terrible kings in fetters. [*Cassel.*] If so, what an impressive lesson it must have read to the captive kings, to contrast the picture they looked upon in that spot, only two days before, with the position they occupied now!

Whom ye slew at Tabor.] The incident is not recorded, but it would appear they had been murdered in cold blood, and not slain in battle; and Gideon, as next of kin, now reckons it his duty to act the part of an avenger of blood (see Num. xxxv). Some imagine it was the execution of Gideon's brothers, by the command of those kings as soon as Gideon's purpose to attack the invaders was made known. [*Lias.*] Not likely, for the kings did not know they were Gideon's brothers till now. Much more probable is it, that in one of the many forays made by these marauders on private properties, the house of Joash had been attacked, and while fighting in its defence, Gideon's brothers had been taken prisoners and carried into the presence of the robber kings, who immediately ordered their execution. However it was, the tragedy was so marked, that, though many others were wantonly put to death, this one made such an impression as to be remembered above others.

As thou art, so were they,] in stately form and chivalrous bearing. They wished to give a complimentary answer as being the only chance they had, though a small one, to plead for their lives.

19. **Sons of my mother.**] A customary phrase where polygamy was so common. The sons of the mother had also the same father, but the sons of the father oftentimes had not the same mother. The sons of the mother were therefore full brothers, and hence the expression "sons of my mother" was reckoned specially endearing (Gen. xliii, 29; Ps. lxix, 8; Deut. xiii., 6).

If ye had let them live, I would not slay you.] This implies that it was by a word from them that they were slain. They were therefore murderers, and justice must now overtake them. Gideon here shows his merciful spirit. He had no pleasure in putting them to death, but he was constrained to do it from considerations of justice, and the law of his God in acting the part of an avenger of blood. It was all but universal in that iron age to put prisoners to death, and often with circumstances of revolting cruelty. Tamerlane put Bajazet, the celebrated sultan, into an iron cage, and treated him as a wild beast, until, maddened with grief and mortification, he dashed out his brains by striking his head against the bars of his cage. Sapor, king of Persia, having taken the Roman Emperor Valerian prisoner, put him to death by flaying him alive.

On a higher ground, these ruthless men deserved to die, because they had wantonly touched the Lord's anointed, and vilely desecrated the heritage of the God of Israel; so that even if Gideon in his clemency had spared them, Divine vengeance could not have suffered them to live (comp. I. Sam. xv., 8, 8, 32, 33).

20. Said unto Jether his first born.] It was reckoned a deep disgrace by all who had a spark of honour in them to be put to death by a woman, or a slave (ix, 54). So these warriors felt it to be a stigma on their name, to have their death-stroke at the hands of a mere boy. Gideon also wished to teach his son in his youth to be the avenger of his country's enemies.

21. Rise thou and fall upon us (I. Kings ii. 46). Escape was hopeless, and, knowing that the practice of holding life cheap, which they had so long applied to others, was now to be applied to themselves, they felt it would be the less of two evils to be despatched by the general himself than by a mere stripling. It was also less horrible to die by a few effective strokes than to be hacked and hewed by hands incompetent to the task. Gideon complied, and so ended the days of the brigand kings. Barbarous and revolting work! excusable only when meting out merited punishment to flagrant transgressors. "To restrain justice at the proper time is to support sin, and not to correct, is to consent to the crime." [*Trapp.*] "*Bonis nocet qui malis parcit.*"

The Ornaments] (comp. Num. xxxi. 48–54). The Hebrew word signifies "*little moons.*" They were crescent-shaped ornaments, generally of gold or silver, worn on the necks, sometimes the foreheads of men and women (Isa. iii. 18), and frequently on the necks of camels. Some think they were shining plates of gold in crescent form suspended from the neck of the camel, and hanging down on their breasts in front. And so the heads, necks, bodies, and legs of camels are still highly ornamented in Eastern countries [*Bush.*] The use of the crescent as a symbol of the Ottoman power is widely known among us. The ancient Ishmaelites were worshippers of the moon.

22. Rule thou over us. When the heavy incubus was removed, and things were beginning to settle down into a state of rest, the uppermost feeling in the mind of every reflecting man was that of gratitude to the noble man, who, through the aid of his God had done so much for his country. Partly by way of recompense, and partly to have a shield of protection for the future, the general voice of the nation was everywhere heard: "Let us make Gideon king!" Such an extraordinary feat of heroism they were ready to worship, and besides it did them honour as a nation. Their proposal they presented in definite form: first, that he himself should be their ruler for life; and then, that his sons should succeed him in perpetuity. They were not in a state to measure their words. They had among them a man who towered above all his compeers in courage, in capacity, in practical wisdom, and in ability to rise to the height of great occasions; yet one who was as humble and meek as any of them all, who was great in his moderation and disinterestedness, also in his self-command and fairness of dealing. Such a man had not been seen in Israel since the days of Joshua or Moses. "Come," said they, "let us make him king, and his sons after him, and so bring back the golden age of our history."

Most unreflecting choice! Had they got their wish, Gideon himself might have done well; but what a broken reed they would have had in Jether! Timid now as a boy, and bidding fair to continue as a boy all his life, he was swept away as a straw by the first brush of Abimelech's strong hand. "Woe unto thee, O Land, when thy king is a child!" The people's error was twofold—(1.) In supposing that Gideon's success was entirely of himself and not of God's Spirit resting upon him; and (2) in forgetting the fact that they already had a King in God Himself, and that any other who might be appointed must be His viceregent, and also must be appointed by God Himself.

23. I will not rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you. Gideon keeps them right. He saw their error in a moment, and felt that if he complied he would be the usurper of a place which Jehovah had reserved for Himself as King in Jeshurun. As the principles of his character had been deep enough to withstand the blasts of adversity, so now they have substance enough not to become evaporated before the sunshine of prosperity. These are brought out in 1 Sam. viii. 5–7; xii. 12–17; Num. xxiii. 21, and other places.

24. Give me, every man, the ear-rings, &c. Rather the *ring* of his prey or booty, for the word is singular. This ring was of gold and valuable. The booty was got from the slain Ishmaelites, who seem to have been the merchant Midianites, the others being freebooters simply. The former were great traders, especially with Egypt, where they sold the spices and balms they got in the East, and were paid in silver and gold. But ear-rings, nose-rings, chains, and pendant-drops made of gold and silver seem to have abounded in Arabia as well as in Egypt. Rings of gold were often used as money in Egypt, as appears by the monuments. [*Speak. Comp.*]

Some would make נֶזֶם mean *nose-rings* instead of *ear-rings*. The word is susceptible of either interpretation, but nose-rings were chiefly worn by women, whereas here the rings were asked of men, and so were more likely to have been ear-rings. These latter were often worn by men. Probably one such ring, or at most two, were worn by each man. Reference is made to this ornament in Gen. xxxv. 4; Ex. xxxii. 2, 3; Job xlii. 11, in all of which places the same word is used (נֶזֶם).

25. They spread a garment. Lit. *the* garment (*ha-simlah*), as if a special one used for such occasions. It was the upper or outer garment, and only a large square piece of cloth. [*Keil.*]

26. The weight of the golden ear-rings.] Probably the weight exceeded his request, for they were in the very enthusiasm of gratitude. As the golden shekel was a little more in weight than two English sovereigns, the value of the ear-rings given would amount to upwards of £3,400 (1700 × 2). This would imply that at least 3,400 Ishmaelites were slain who wore golden ear-rings, a small number of the whole army. Those who wore such must have been of superior rank. At the battle of Cannae no fewer than three bushels of gold rings were taken from the dead bodies of the knights and senators that fell on that bloody day.

There are different words used in this account.

1. *Saharonim* are the "little moons," or crescent-shaped ornaments of silver or gold which men and women alike wore upon their necks (ver. 21), and also hung round the necks of their camels.

2. *Nezem*, the ear-rings of gold (ver. 24, 25, 26).*

3. *Netiphoth*, not "collars" but pearl-shaped ear-drops, like the pendants of modern ear-rings (ver. 26).†

4. *Anakoth.* Necklaces or chains around the neck (Prov. i. 9; Cant. iv. 9). "They put a band of cloth or leather round the animal's neck, on which are strung small shells called cowries. The Sheiks add silver ornaments to these, which make a rich booty to the spoiler" [see *Wellsted, Travels.*]

5. *Aregaman bigedi*, purple clothing, or garments of purple. They may have got the Tyrian dye from the shores of the Mediterranean. "This is the first indication of purple as a royal colour." [*Bush.*]

Gideon had now great wealth at his feet, but all that he retained for himself was the spoil which he got from the Midianitish kings. His aims were higher than those of Clive, in India, (pure as he was when compared with others) as he walked amid heaps of gold taken from the Nabobs and others.

27. Made an ephod and put it in his city. Gideon has for the most part been severely condemned for this act, as if his uprightness had at last given way before the poisonous influence of the idolatrous atmosphere around him. Rightly interpreted, his conduct indicates no intention whatever in the direction of idolatry. Being civil ruler, his privilege was to inquire of God by the High Priest. The *working coat* of the High Priest was the ephod (see Ex. xxviii. 6–12). It was the distinctive priestly garment. It had no sleeves, but went round the breast, and contained the Urim and Thummim, which were essential when inquiring of God. His object was then to inquire of God, or receive instructions from Him in all matters of special difficulty, where the exercise of his own judgment was insufficient. This was an intention wholly consistent with true piety.

But though the intention was good, the act was wrong; for God had already appointed a High Priest in another place to discharge these very functions. His act was, therefore, equivalent to the practical setting aside of what God had already done. In Shiloh was the ark, and there was the High Priest. But Shiloh was in the tribe of Ephraim, and Gideon felt sore under the jealous spirit so strongly cherished by that tribe. He might also think that they had sunk so low in their loyalty to the God of Israel, that they were unworthy to be the custodiers of the Divine oracle for all Israel. Therefore, he wished to have an oracle in his own city, and under his own care, conscious as he was of his own entire loyalty to his God. But it was not for Gideon to establish rules for the worship of his God, nor for any mortal man to assume that his judgment might decide anything in such a matter. Whatever was wrong in the existing state of things it was for God Himself to put right.

"A good aim does not alone make a good action. Gideon must have a good warrant as well as a good motive" [*Trapp.*] If Gideon supposed that because he had already once offered sacrifice on an altar in Ophrah and been accepted, therefore he might continue to do so as a rule, either by himself or by a priest, he entirely forgot that the circumstances were most special and not to be repeated.

An ephod thereof,] *i.e.*, he made the gold and cloth, &c., which he had received into an ephod, which was the most costly part of the High Priest's dress. The material was worked throughout with gold threads, and there were precious stones set in gold braid on the shoulder-pieces, and chains made of gold to fasten the parts. But there was no image, far less the form of an idol like the golden calf of Aaron.

All Israel went thither a whoring after it,] *i.e.*, they made an idol of the ephod itself, giving that worship to the mere piece of dress which idol-worshippers do to a block or a stone. The

* "Those golden ear-rings were ill-bestowed on such uncircumcised ears as Ishmaelites had." *Trapp*

† These ear-pendants made of pearls were peculiar to kings and persons of rank as compared with the simple rings worn by the other Midianites. The word *natap* means a drop

homage of the heart was illicitly bestowed. That was perverting Gideon's well-intentioned work to a very bad use, from which he would have shrunk back with abhorrence. Jerubbaal, the idol-destroyer, could never have knowingly encouraged the idol-worshippers.

The country was in quietness forty years, &c.] There was no special outbreak of sin in public, and so there were no public displays of Divine judgment made, though the waters of sin might be rising silently over the land. The forty years may be dated from the time of Gideon's call. How powerful is the influence of a great name, when its greatness arises from its goodness! Would that every wearer of a crown might notice this!

29. Went and dwelt in his own house.] He makes himself as one of the common people, notwithstanding that no man before or after him had better title to live in a palace and wear a crown. The continuance of the name Jerubbaal was an honour to his memory similar to that which the name Israel was to Jacob.

32. Died in a good old age.] His days were long in the land which he had been honoured to restore (Gen. xv. 15; xxv. 8; I. Chron. xxix. 28; Job xlii. 17). His God had carried him to hoar hairs (Isa. xlvi. 4), "though his last evil act were some spot to his white head." [*Trapp.*]

33. As soon as Gideon was dead, they turned again.] The breakwater being removed, the waters rushed out. Sin, and especially the sin of idolatry was with them a passion. Well might it be said to them, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away!" After all the sharp lessons they had been taught, they still have learned nothing.

"Though woo'd and aw'd,
They are flagrant rebels still."

34. Remembered not the Lord.] "My people are bent to backsliding from me. They have slidden back by a perpetual backsliding. Ephraim is a cake not turned."

35. Neither showed they kindness.] Where there is no right principle in the heart, there is no foundation for trusting that the most solemn engagement will be kept, when a man casts off all fear of God, he is not likely to make conscience of doing his duty to his fellow men.

SPECIAL QUESTIONS.

Certain questions grow out of this narrative which deserve particular notice, and which apply equally to all the heathen adversaries that fought against Israel and their God. It is distinctly conveyed, that the defeat of these adversaries in turn, was not merely an accident arising out of the fortunes of war, but was a special judgment sent upon them by Jehovah for the manner in which they despised His great name, and trampled in the mire the people whom He had redeemed.

One question which arises out of this, is—

I. Can the Heathen sin against light.

Did Zebah and Zalmunna know that they were committing great sin, in doing what they did to Israel, and their God? Is it not characteristic of the heathen that they do not know the true God; and if so, how could they be held guilty of profaning His name, and contemning His authority? They had no Bible, no sanctuary service for Jehovah established among them, no series of instructors among them like the prophets, no one to impart to them in proper form a knowlege of the truth about the true God. It was not only a rare event, but almost a solecism for a servant of the Lord to be sent with a special message of penitence to the king of Nineveh, as Jonah was. The density of the darkness might be gathered from the answer returned by the men of Ethiopia to Philip's question, "How can I understand except some one guide me."

Indeed the heathen universally "sat in darkness." "Gross darkness covered" the multitudes throughout all heathendom. They were "without

God, and without hope in the world." Their description is often given as those that "know not God." But if they had no proper knowledge of the true God, how could they understand the nature of His claims upon them, and if they did not understand these claims, how could their condemnation be just? It is manifest that we must look a little more closely into the subject to get quit of this difficulty.

Are we anywhere told, that the heathen are *absolutely ignorant* of *either the existence, or the character of the true God?* That they were *relatively* so, as compared with the seed of Abraham, is everywhere said, just as moonlight or starlight is inferior to that of the sun. But the question is, "Had they any light at all sufficient to constitute a foundation for responsibility?" This question we unhesitatingly answer in the affirmative. For where there is responsibility there must be light in some degree. Guilt lies in acting contrary to that light.

(1.) *There is the light of nature.* By looking on the works of the natural world, the first candid instinct of the heathen mind is not to worship the works, but Him who made the works, and to see glorious features of character shining through the works. It is not till afterwards, when men, disliking the presence of God, and trying to get quit of Him altogether, begin to give that homage to the objects of nature which ought to be reserved for the Framer of nature. This we take to be the meaning of the important paragraph in Rom. i. 20 with its connection. That the heathen, though not instructed by revelation, know, or ought to know, something of God as a basis of their responsibility is clear from Rom. i. 19, 21, 25, 28, 32; Acts xiv. 17. They are said to be "without excuse."

Nature gave them light, not only on the existence and character of God, but also on *the code of duty which He has laid down for human conduct.* For "having not the law (written) they are a law to themselves," etc. (Rom. ii. 14, 15). This applied not only to a few solitary cases, when a sheik like Job rose up to instruct the people among whom he lived; but the law is written more or less legibly on every man's heart. The universal conviction, not only that sacrifices, but that costly sacrifices were expressly needed to propitiate the superior powers, proved beyond doubt that they felt they were guilty. This is confirmed, too, by Rom. i. 32.

(2.) There was also *the light of the history of God's Israel.* The history of God's Church in the world was, to these heathen nations, a kind of Bible about God's character and ways. It was a great addition to the light of nature. The first grand display of His character given by means of His Church was when He smote the Egyptians with such terrible plagues, and redeemed His people from bondage with a high hand and stretched out arm. This was pitching the key-note. All the series of events that followed were such as to reveal the God of Israel to be immeasurably superior to all others that were called by the name of gods, and to prove distinctly that He was God alone, and there was none else. If the nations were not convinced of this, they had ample evidence to convince them of the sin and folly of choosing any other god, and of daring to touch the people that were called by His name.

This two-fold light undoubtedly these kings with their armies had, so that though their privilege was small indeed compared with that of Israel, it was yet sufficient to make them conscious they were committing great sin in rising up against the God of Israel, and wantonly destroying the people who were dear to Him as the apple of His eye! The impression made on all the surrounding heathen nations by God's remarkable dealings with His people is indicated in such passages as these:—Deut. ii. 25; Josh. ii. 9–11; vi.; x. 1, 2; 1 Sam. iv. 7–9.

II. Does the guilt of the wicked entirely destroy sympathy for them in their punishment?

Are we to have no pity for such men as Zebah and Zalmunna when we think of their terrible fate, or must the fact that they defied the God of Israel, and put to death in cold blood so many of His chosen people, make us shut up all bowels of compassion for them? When we see innocent persons barbarously murdered by some monster of cruelty, we instinctively have far more sympathy with them than we can have for the perpetrator of the horrid deed himself, when he comes to suffer the last sentence of the law. There can be no doubt that guilt lessens sympathy; but does it entirely close it up? Or, if we are afflicted at seeing a criminal suffer, when he has brought it down on himself by his evil conduct, does not that seem as if we objected to the due reward of his deeds being measured out to him? Are we to have more sympathy with the man than with the administration of justice? Men's sense of the evil of sin, and its awful desert is, in this world, so small, that it seems harsh and cruel when any heavy dispensation is inflicted. But the time is coming when another light shall be shed upon it, and when what now appears to be so small shall be seen to reach the heavens, and to call for the awful frown of Him who is the Guardian of righteousness, and purity and truth.

On this side of the subject there are some solemn statements in the Book of God. The inspired apostle, when closing one of his epistles, says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maranatha." This many interpret to mean—*accursed at the coming of the Lord, or for the Lord comes.* But, however we explain it, the meaning is most solemn. If *anathema* had stood alone its natural force is—*devoted to destruction,* and ητω implies *let him be,* as if the apostle, speaking on behalf of all the good were to have no more sympathy with him, but to say—*that* is the only destiny suitable for him. Not to love Christ will then, in the clear light of eternity, appear so tremendous a crime that nothing but absolute destruction will, in the judgment of all, be regarded as the only fit treatment of it. Even now, speaking through the Spirit, this inspired man can say—Let it be so. All this corresponds with the words that shall come from the lips of the Judge Himself, "Depart from me ye *cursed,* etc." It also corresponds with the phrase "the wrath of the Lamb," and that other statement, "Again they said, Alleluia! and her smoke rose up for ever and ever." Sympathy with the claims of eternal righteousness will in the light of eternity be so strong, as to lead the righteous to acquiesce in the destruction of their fellow-men who have rejected the Saviour.

But are we then to drop all sympathy with the wicked because of their wickedness? We do not read the teachings of scripture so, nor yet the teachings of our own hearts. The common feeling of humanity leads us to grieve at the spectacle of a wicked man suffering misery, though we know and admit that he deserves it. We say, it is not his misfortune but his crime. Yet we mourn for the man, while we emphatically condemn his conduct. We mourn that he should be of a wicked spirit, and allow himself to be led by wicked influences, so bringing down upon himself the righteous judgments of God. Our sorrow is not alone for his misery, but that he should be under the power of sin, and so necessarily be miserable. Grief at seeing the wicked punished by the hand of justice must always be accompanied by abhorrence of the guilt which has made the punishment necessary.

Thus it was with Him, who, in this, as in all other matters, is our perfect example. His lamentation over unbelieving Jerusalem was deep and sincere, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, &c." (Matt. xxiii. 37). Yet how severe His condemnation was of their sin may be learned from v. 33 of the same chapter. Such was the depth of His compassion, that at the very moment when He was bearing

His cross on to Calvary, He seemed to forget His own sufferings at the sight of theirs (Luke xxiii. 28). Most wonderful of all, He shed tears over them when He thought of them as lost souls (Luke xix. 41, 42). Yet he abated not any of the heavy calamities that were impending over their heads, and which He Himself, in the exercise of His power as Ruler over all, would inflict upon them for their sins in due time (Matt. xxiv. 4–28).

Our sympathies then should go out to the wicked, not as adhering to their wickedness, but in the way of earnestly desiring that they should turn from their evil ways, and receive Christ as their Saviour, that so they may receive deliverance in harmony with the laws of righteousness and truth. Our feeling towards the heathen world all over, should be that of profound sorrow, that so many of our fellow creatures should be without the proper knowledge of God, and the means of salvation by the blood of Christ, and to do our very utmost to extend that knowledge to the ends of the earth, in deep sympathy with them as our fellow men.

III. Does God set up the wicked as a mark for punishment according to the degree of their guilt, or by what rule?

Were Zebah and Zalmunna greater sinners than all the heathen rulers of their day that they should be singled out for special punishment? If Sisera was made an example of the divine vengeance, why should Jabin, his master, be passed by? Why should Og and Sihon, kings of the Amorites, be slain in battle, while Balak, king of Moab, is spared? Why should the population of so many of the towns of the Canaanites be all put to death, while those that dwelt in several others were left? Is it always the greatest sinners that are thus set up as a mark for God's judgments; and, if so, would the common wicked escape such judgment, on the ground that their sins were not so great as to warrant such retribution?

A fatal error, we believe, it would be to suppose that *any sin is of so slight a character as not to deserve some manifestation of the Divine frown*, for sin in its very nature implies that the creature abandons its God, renounces His authority, and disobeys His laws. And as God is jealous for His own character He must frown on such a creature. If God were therefore to inflict on men the full measure of their desert in this world, He would send some visible and strong mark of his displeasure on all men without exception. But that is not now the rule. It is only in rare instances that special inflictions are sent. The rule is *to give specimen cases of how God regards sin, and how He will deal with it.* Thus Christ warns his hearers against the error of supposing, that those on whom severe calamities are sent were sinners above all other men. His solemn language is, "I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke xiii. 2-5). He informs them that their sins deserved similar calamities, and if they did not fall on them, it was of God's mercy, and not because they were not equally liable to receive the same treatment.

Though it is often those that sin with a high hand that are dealt with most severely, many who sin in this manner are often passed by. Sodom was a city remarkable for its wickedness (Gen. xiii. 13), and was turned into ashes by the fire of heaven falling upon it, as an example to those that should live ungodly in after ages. Yet our Saviour speaks of some of the towns in His day as if they were worse in character, though they had no such vials of wrath poured upon them. "I say unto you, Capernaum, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." (Luke x. 10-15).

The rule then by which special visible manifestations of the Divine anger are made against communities, or individuals in this world, is not always the greatness of their guilt above other places, though it sometimes is so, but *when the case chosen is suitable to serve as a specimen of what God might righteously do in similar circumstances.*

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 18–35.

I.—The Troubled End of the Wicked.

1.—Preparations for his Fall.

(1.) *He had to answer for his sins to Israel's God.* "God reigneth over the heathen." He is "Judge of all the earth." "Say among the heathen, the Lord reigneth." "Every one shall give an account of himself unto God." (1 Sam. ii. 3; Eccl. xii. 14; Heb. iv. 13; Acts xvii. 31; Eccl. xi. 9; Rom. ii. 16.) This is God's world; and all its inhabitants are His creatures. To Him and Him alone, are they responsible for their conduct. It was this God—Israel's God—whom these kings wickedly dared to defy. It was with Him they were really at war. It was with His power they dared to contend, and His holy name which they despised. It was His children, on whom they inflicted so many bleeding wounds, and whose lives they so capriciously destroyed. For every act of impiety, therefore—for every wanton exercise of power, and every barbarous deed, to the God of Israel were they really responsible as their Judge. Thus was preparation made for an evil day.

(2.) *The sinner's blindness to his sin, and its consequences.* These men of the desert, doubtless, had their memories filled with reports of what the God of Israel had done, and how superior He was to all the gods of the nations, and it was their duty to have prosecuted this knowledge to its just conclusion. But when they saw the rich valleys and smiling plains of Israel, and found a people weak as children only defending them, their lust for possessing so valuable a prize rose within them; they shut their eyes to every consideration of moral right, and the fear of God, and grasped at the booty which was so easily within their reach. Men cannot look upon sin with open face so long as their moral vision is not impaired, for it immediately raises a struggle within one's own breast. The will strongly desires what is forbidden, and conscience thunders against it. To save this struggle the man shuts his eyes, and makes himself blind both to sin and its consequences. By getting into a habit of not looking at sin in its evil nature, and not reflecting on its sad consequences, a man gradually becomes practically blind, so that he is able to commit sin with little remorse. Satan, meanwhile, greatly assists the soul in this self-blinding process, by the fascinating pictures which he sets before it of the gratification of sinful desires, and by turning away the attention from the voice of conscience. Indeed, that tremendous power which God has put into the soul to represent His own authority over it, he attempts to silence by drugging it; just as Mercury, when he proceeded to the task of putting Argus to death, found that he could not succeed on account of that monster having one hundred eyes, and when some of them slept, others were always awake, so that he could not come near him to effect his purpose. He, therefore, thought of drugging him all over, and having at last got all the eyes to shut, he speedily accomplished his object. "O, sir," said a Christian lady to a young man of noble extraction, who was going on thoughtlessly in a wild career of sin, "O, if you would but think—only think!" "I cannot think," he replied; "I dare

not think—thought kills me!" When conscience is stifled, when Satan is listened to, when a deaf ear is turned to Christ, when reason is kept under and passion is allowed to reign, then there is darkness, and the works of darkness are done. (*See* 2 Cor. iv. 4; John xii. 37-40.) On the Deceptive Character of Sin, *see* p. 197, etc.

(3.) *The wicked's persistent continuance in sin.* These heathen marauders having been successful for one year in the work of spoiling Jehovah's vineyard, and apparently no harm coming of it, they returned a second year, then a third and a fourth, until seven years had passed. They would begin to think that this people were deserted of their God, or possibly, all that they heard of Him and His doings were but dreams of the past. At any rate, there was no cloud in the sky to make them afraid. Why should they not continue to fatten on these fat pastures, and gratify themselves to the full? "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is set in them to do evil."

While they were thus imagining that the Lord did not see, neither did the God of Jacob regard, the plans of Heaven were maturing. He who is angry with the wicked every day, was whetting His sword and bending His bow. Time was allowed for the evil-doers to repent of their conduct, but as of this, after seven years' trial, there were no symptoms, God arose from His place and executed judgment on His adversaries. This persistence in sin shows an advance in blindness of the understanding and hardness of heart.

(4.) *The certainty that the wicked's sin shall in due time find him out.* How confounding it must have been for these kings, now to find themselves helpless prisoners in the hands of the very brother of the innocent men, whom in the wantonness of their power they had slaughtered so recently at Mount Tabor, for no other alleged crime than that they had endeavoured to defend their property from the spoliation of freebooters! Then their sin seemed to them a thing to mock at; now it stands out so serious a thing as to cost them their lives. Many other ruthless deeds, doubtless, they had perpetrated. Now this one sin is made the means of bringing down meet punishment for all the rest. Every perfection of Jehovah's character demands that every sin be at some time visited with its just desert. His sovereignty regards it as an outrage of the creature against the authority of the Creator. His jealousy will not suffer that any spot or stain should exist, under the moral government of One who is so greatly to be feared. His justice will not allow that the standard of righteousness be in any degree lowered, beyond the point of absolute perfection. His holiness will not permit that any instance of sin should occur in any part of His pure universe, without some fit mark being put upon it of His detestation. His omniscience searches out the culprit—His omnipresence holds him fast in every place, and His omnipotence lays him for ever low in the dust; while Divine Providence causes every gate to be shut against him among the creatures, so that he shall have none to associate with, and none to pity him in the universal creation of God. How much do we owe to Him who, to every believer, prevents all this by the endurance of the bitter death of the cross!

2. The greatness of his fall.

This is measured by—

(1.) The *height* from which he fell. Over that vast host, that filled the valley and covered the slopes of Jezreel, these men bore absolute sway. A whole nation living in tents were as grasshoppers before them. Whom they would they slew, and whom they would they kept alive. To one they said Go, and he went; to another Come, and he came; to a third Do this, and he did

it. They formed the double helm that guided the movements of that huge host. Their hearts were filled with proud and exultant feelings, as they looked on the magnificent spectacle of men and camels, crowding on each other over all the plain as far as the eye could reach, all glittering with jewels of silver and jewels of gold, the halfmoon-shaped ornaments conspicuous everywhere, as became the worshippers of the luminary of the night sky. Nature was calm around them, as they cursed the God of Israel, and trampled His people down before them as dust in their path. For days and months the sun shone on peacefully as before, and they were wholly unconscious of danger or surprise.

But the decree had gone forth; they had been weighed in the balances and found wanting; their days of sin and cruelty were numbered. From the watch-tower in the skies a messenger came down to tell, that the God of Jacob had seen the wrongs inflicted on his chosen people, and was about to fell the oppressor to the dust. As in a moment, the avalanche fell on the tents of Midian; the host ran, and cried, and fled. But who could escape the wrath of Him who could set all the resources of nature against them? They were cut down as the grass; they withered as the green herb—

> Like the leaves of the forest, when summer is green,
> That host with their banners at sunset were seen;
> Like the leaves of the forest, when autumn has blown,
> That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

And now the two leaders stand all alone, stripped of everything, not a man of their armies left, waiting to receive their death-stroke at the hands of a mere boy!

(2.) The fall came *irresistibly;* nothing could withstand the destructive agency when it came. Who could stop that panic that arose in a moment at the midnight hour, when the signal was given by the braying of so many trumpets and the breaking of the pitchers? From that moment the work of death-dealing went on till only a speck remained on the distant mountains, of the dense cloud of men that obeyed the commands of these mighty chieftains. "They were chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind." It was a precipitous fall, as if they had been hurled violently over a cliff.

(3.) They were *utterly helpless* in their fall; they seem not to have been able to use a single stroke in beating back the wave. Not a man of Gideon's army was killed nor even wounded; the 300 remained intact to the end. "None of the men of might in that hostile camp did find their hands." What a picture of helplessness when 15,000 men should have allowed themselves to be either cut to pieces or scattered by 300 men, whose strength was completely exhausted—that is, at the rate of every fifty men allowing themselves to be smitten by one man without returning a blow!

(4.) The fall was *unexpected and rapid.* Nothing seemed more preposterous than to suppose, that a few stragglers gathering together on the mountains of Manasseh should inflict any serious blow on the myriads of Midian; and if by any means some advantage had been gained for Israel, the natural thought was, that it must have been only by slow degrees that these spoilers could have been driven out of the country. But in little more than a single day is the work done. When the day of reckoning comes, it is "as a thief in the night." "Blessed is he that watcheth." "The wicked are chased away as a vision of the night." "When they are saying Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh." When a wicked man has been reasoned with, has been implored to repent and believe, and has had much patience exercised towards him while yet he does not return, then he is "driven away in his wickedness"—he "dies in his sins."

5. *The Fall was ruin—irremediable and final.* "The Midianites lifted up their heads no more" (ver. 28). Forty years passed away, and Gideon was still alive, but all that time we do not hear a single sound from the land of Midian against Israel. They had received so terrible a lesson, that they trembled at the very thought of contending with so great a God again. The Fall here recorded was not merely a reverse, or even a heavy misfortune, which, as the wheel turns round might be again reversed, but it was a casting down to destruction; so that while contemplating what God had done we might well exclaim with the prophet, "O wheel!" (comp. the Fall of Sisera pp. 299-307).

II. The honour attending the last days of the righteous man.

We place the two characters in contrast, the righteous and the wicked. They differ in character and conduct in active life, and they differ in the end of life. The wicked we have seen spend life in fighting against God, and in the end they have many sorrows. But the righteous go through life walking with God, trusting in Him, led by Him, and acknowledging Him in all their ways, and in the end all things smile upon them (see Ps. xxxii. 10). There is much instruction to be got in studying the history of both characters, each of them taken by itself. But there is much additional instruction to be had from looking at the two in contrast, and hence we find them often placed together in scripture, one against the other so as to be contrasted. We sometimes see them in pairs as Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Saul and David, and others. Again we see them in communities generally, the people of God on the one hand, and those who have cast off God on the other. At one time, we see promises and many gracious words spoken to the righteous, while threatenings and forebodings of future wrath are held out to the other. But the end of life is generally set forth as the time when the contrast becomes most complete. The righteous are then dealt with as jewels, and the wicked as dross, "then shall we return and discern between the righteous and the wicked" (see Mal. iii. 17, 18; Matt. iii. 12; xiii. 30; xxv. 34, 41, 46; Luke xiii. 28, 29.)

Here what a contrast between the heads of the Midianitish army, and the head of the army of Israel. We have seen the one go down under a dark cloud never more to appear, but, turning to the other side, we see a name destined to go down to everlasting remembrance. "Light is sown for the righteous." "His horn shall be exalted with honour." What was the kind of honour which Gideon had in his last days?

1. It was in the moral greatness of his character.

It was not the honour of wealth, though he had that; not the honour of being a great patriot though he had much of that; not the honour of having a public ovation from the people, though that also he had to the full; nor was it that highest distinction which any people could offer to such a man, when with one consent they asked him to become their king. No; his honour lay in *refusing* a crown, not in having it *offered* him. Moral greatness is the true greatness of a man, when he places right principle higher than himself, and prefers to do what is best to be done, rather than what might suit his own interests, or is most agreeable to his own will. Gideon made the glory of God his chief good, and all his thoughts continually circled around that. For the sake of the name of his God, he braved every blast in the rough days of adversity, and now in the warm sunshine of prosperity, when the temptation to have his own name put forward at one point, in place of his God, is set before him, he meets it with a "Get thee behind me, Satan"—"I will not rule over you, neither shall any son that I have—the Lord shall rule over you."

Gideon quite comprehended the position, which, alas! few or none else seemed to do. Israel was the Lord's people. They belonged to Him as His redeemed, His chosen, whom he raised up for a special purpose in the world. They were His alone, and could belong to no other. He had also made Himself over to them to become theirs. He was their God, and therefore their King. It was wrong for them to think of any other head. All this was settled once for all at the outset of their history, and it was settled by solemn covenant. It was therefore an impious thought to suggest that a mere man, or any other than the Eternal God Himself, should be their Judge, Lawgiver, and King (I Sam. viii. 5-7).

Gideon's act was, therefore, far above that of a Cincinnatus, who, after his great feat in accomplishing the deliverance of his country from a great danger, cared not to accept of any high rewards, but quietly returned to his farm and his plough. Another case of moral sublimity we have in Washington, who, though he permitted himself to be called by the title of President, yet refused all thought of royalty. Julius Cæsar was thrice presented with a kingly crown, and this he as often refused; but policy rather than principle appeared to be his motive. Cromwell reached the highest pinnacle of success, and chose to be called Lord Protector rather than king, but this too seemed to be on the ground of policy. Gideon alone, of all the characters of history, was by the unanimous voice of the nation hailed as king, and yet at once and with decision, on the high ground of a Divine arrangement, he rejected the tempting proposal.

2. He enjoyed the highest respect of his people. So many things, both in his character and conduct, were fitted to excite admiration, that it is not wonderful if he had the highest respect of all the good from Dan to Beersheba. The modesty of his demeanour, his singular meekness in dealing with the Ephraimites (chap. viii. 1-3), his implicit obedience to the instructions given him by the angel, his bold opposition to Baal, as the root of his country's evils, his rising to the height of the great occasion when the Midianites had to be fought with and conquered, and the amazing success which in less than two short days had crowned his extraordinary exertions—these and other elements raised him so high in the people's estimation, that the whole nation felt they never could do him enough honour. The whole land was full of his fame for forty years. In fact, even in Israel's remarkable history, there was nothing brighter to speak of or to sing of, than of his name and his doings. He lived in the hearts of his people. If he asked their silver and their gold, he might have it as much as he chose to name (chap. viii. 24-26). If he wished them to carry on their worship in his city Ophrah, they came there at his desire. If they even abstained from the rites of Baal worship, which so many loved in their hearts, it was out of respect to his name that they did so, for so long as he remained with them no altars of Baal were frequented in Israel.

3. The whole land enjoyed peace for his sake. "The country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon." This was a high honour conferred on any man to say of him, that for his sake the whole land enjoyed the inestimable blessings of peace for so long a period. Such was the honour put on him by Divine Providence. For doubtless there were many secret causes of provocation among all the tribes, during the most of that period. Idolatry was the besetting sin everywhere, and, but for the strong influence of Gideon's name, it must have broken out publicly in not a few places. Gideon, too, was ever thought of as the Jerubbaal—the conqueror and adversary of Baal, and this must have done much to keep back the rising tide of idol worship, and so to ward off the Divine judgments. He lived in his own house in peace, for so long a time, and the land had no special troubles for his sake.

4. He was blessed with long life—"died in a good old age."

This phrase, which is used also of Abraham (Gen. xxv. 8) and of David (1 Chron. xxix. 28), and the similar phrase "full of days" which is spoken of Job (chap. xlii. 17), implies that the man who saw such a length of days was visibly blessed of God. In that age, when God taught his people so much by emblems, there was a deeper significance in the enjoyment of temporal prosperity as the sign of the Divine favour, than there is now under the Dispensation of the Spirit. In nearly all the descriptions given of the manner in which God will bless the man whom He loves, it is the language of temporal blessing that is used. In Job v. 26, the man who submits to God's correction, after experiencing many deliverances from God's gracious hand, is promised that at last he "will come to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season." And among the numerous proofs of the Divine favour, which are promised to the man who makes choice of God as his own God, and looks to Him as his refuge, the list closes with the blessing of long life (Ps. xci. 16). The mere prolongation of life itself is a natural blessing, but it is chiefly of value when it is given as a mark of the Divine favour.

It cannot indeed now be predicted with the same definiteness, as in the days when the teaching of the Church was by symbols, that external prosperity, or *the prolongation of life, is an indication of the Divine favour to the possessor above other men;* indeed, it is one of the mysteries of Divine Providence, that the way of the wicked prospers more frequently than that of the righteous, though not so much in the matter of long life, as in that of external prosperity. But that the righteous have immensely the advantage, both from the nature of the case, and from the assurances of Scripture, is clear. The righteous have always God's blessing with their portion, which, even if that be small, it will yield more real enjoyment, than would a princely fortune to the man on whom God frowned (Ps. xxxvii. 16, 11, 25, &c.). In Isa. lxv. 20, we have a remarkable statement respecting long life as a sure indication of the Divine favour, implying that when God rises up to bless His Church, there will no longer be persons who have only an infant's age, nor any man called "old," who has not filled up the days of an old man (such will be the care which God in His Providence will exercise over him); for he who will be reckoned only a child in those days will really have lived 100 years, and the sinful man who dies at the early age of 100 years will be reckoned accursed of God, for not having nearly reached what shall then be the common limit of life. An eminent thinker defines the word "sinner," to mean, *one who misses the mark*, and translates the last line of the verse thus: "He who misses the mark of 100 years, will be reckoned accursed of God," because his life will appear cut short, so that he does not live half his days.

5. The good man's grievous errors. However bright the name of Gideon, though it shines as a star of the first magnitude in the Old Testament sky, it is not without its spots (Eccl. vii. 20). The Bible good man is, in this world, one who was originally a bad man, now in process of being made good. God Himself is the worker; the means employed are of His choosing, and the work will in due time be made perfect, but as yet it is only in process. Hence the struggles of the "old man" with the "new man," and the strivings of the "Spirit against the flesh" (see Gal. v. 17; Eph. iv. 22–24). The extinguishing of human depravity in any human heart is not effected instantaneously, but is a gradual operation. Hence the proper light in which to look at any good man is not to regard him as of a different mould from other men, or taken from a different stock, but to regard any spiritual excellence of character which he has above other men, as wholly due to the grace of God working in him.

Gideon was guilty of the sin so common in his time of polygamy. "He had many wives." This was a distinct violation of the law of marriage even by the light of nature (Gen. ii. 22, 24; Mal. ii. 14, 13), and more emphatically by the light of the written law of Moses (Ex. xx. 14). But there was so much fog in the atmosphere of those days, before the glorious sun had risen in the sky, that men could but dimly read the meaning of heaven's laws. Thus, surrounded by the corrupt practices of every other community on earth, even some of the best of God's people gave way before the evil example (1 Cor. xv. 33). But the light of those times being small relatively, certain evil practices were not condemned so strongly as they are in the clearer light of gospel times (Matt. v. 31, 32). It is said with regard to many points of conduct, "The times of this ignorance God winked at"—*passed over.* The sins were seen, were hated, were condemned, but God did not in many cases *execute the sentence* they deserved. Yet sin in every case, and in every age, is condemned by God quite as much among His own people, and even more, than among others (see on this whole subject pp. 322-4).

Gideon allied himself with a Canaanitish family. The maidservant whom he married, of the house of Shechem, appears to have belonged to the idolatrous portion of that clan (see v. 31; ix. 18, &c.) This was the sin which had been forbidden more expressly than any other, and which led to many a dark day in the homes of Israel (Ex. xxxiv. 16; Deut. vii. 3, 4; Jud. iii. 6, 7). Bitter consequences also came down on Gideon's house, as the sequel will show.

Gideon made an ephod and put it in his city, as a point of worship for the people. We have already spoken of this, and pronounced it an error of *judgment,* rather than of *intention.* He had not, so far as appears, the most remote intention of encouraging idolatry. That was at the very antipodes of his thoughts and wishes. But as Shiloh, the only centre for the worship of Israel's God in the land, was in the tribe of Ephraim, and as the Ephraimites had already shown themselves so sensitive in their dealings, both with himself and with the men of Manasseh, he was apprehensive lest, on the occasion of one or other of the frequent visits that might be made, from persons of his own and other tribes in the north, to Shiloh, some spark might kindle a flame of resentment, which would both put an end to the worship, and envelope the country in civil war. There was the greater reason to fear this, that Ephraim contained such large numbers of the idolatrous classes. The intention, here, we believe, was only for good, for Gideon was eminently a man of peace, and had already shown that he could make large sacrifices to avoid a quarrel with brethren.

But he was in serious error. He tried to do a right thing in a wrong way. God had already appointed the place of His worship, and also the men who should minister to Him in the service. And not even a Gideon durst interfere to make any alteration on it before Him. If such dangers as Gideon feared actually existed, Jehovah was well able to take care of his own service. But this God-fearing man thought that, as he had already been taken into the service of Jehovah, he was not acting presumptuously now in wearing the priest's ephod, or working dress, and so personating that official in his office. But he had received no call to enter into that office, though on one occasion he was specially called to erect an altar and offer sacrifice (ch. vi. 25, &c.). It was therefore a false step. What keeps everything right in the matters of God, is to act implicitly at His command. In place of this, Gideon now acted according to his own judgment. Evil results followed. The first step taken being wrong, another and another went further from the line of duty, until at last the people fell into the old pit of idolatry—the very last thing which the good man who took the first false step ever dreamt of.

When Epicurus, the founder of the celebrated school, made his *summum bonum* consist of that which ministered best for pleasure, he little imagined to

what lengths of impurity and bestiality, many of his disciples would carry his system. Neither did Socinus seem to realise at first, how far the doctrine or principle would carry him, of making reason, the judge of everything the Bible declared about God. And all through Church History especially, we have many warnings not to trust to human reason, when it would determine for itself in the face of any commandment of the Lord.

Yet, with all these serious drawbacks, there are so many elements of excellence in Gideon's character, that it shines resplendent on the page of Scripture history, and is remembered down to New Testament times, where again it is taken up (Heb xi. 32, &c.), and held up as a bright picture to be looked at to the end of time. From the days of Joshua to those of Samuel, no such full account is given of any other of Israel's heroes. Through the long decline of a green old age, he is continually pointed to, as he goes out and in among the people, as Jerubbaal, the man who dared to fight and was able to conquer Baal. And when he dies at last, it is when the field has long been clear of enemies, and when he is surrounded only by friends. Amid the regrets of all, with the blessings of love poured on his head, and the gifts of honour laid on his bier, he is put into his father's sepulchre, and laid in the family vault, leaving his praises to be sung, and his example to be followed, by many in every home of the land he loved so well.

N.B.—*We have now reached that stage in our remarks on the matter of this Book, that we have practically discussed all the more important principles it contains, so that in what follows it is not necessary that our comments should be otherwise than brief, and that frequent references be made to the thoughts already given.*

THE PREFACE TO CHAPTER IX.

CHAP. VIII., 33–35.

1. The immediate result of Gideon's death. This might be expressed in one short line. *The people relapsed into idolatry.* Notwithstanding all the long-continued lesson read to them by that splendid career, and notwithstanding all the warnings of the past, and the terrible seasons of chastisement they had come through, they still spring anew to that sin, the moment that the hand that kept them back from it is removed. The good judge is dead, and Israel fly to their idols, is the purport of the story. (*See* the character of the unteachable heart, and God's dealings with it, on pp. 311–318; also 186, 189–192.) This is instructive.

(1.) It showed that *their previous penitence wanted root.* Impressions, however strong, made on the human heart will not last, unless they take root in the understanding, the affections, and the will.

(2.) *The sin of worshipping other objects in place of God is a passion with the depraved human heart.*

(3.) *Inveterate sin is without shame.* Therefore it loses self-respect.

(4.) *It is blind, and regardless of consequences.*

(5.) *If not arrested, it leads to sudden destruction.* (Prov. xxix. 1.)

In this case, happily, the covenant stood between them and that.

2. The people's ingratitude to both God and man. (1.) It springs from *want of consideration.* How often does God complain, "My people do not

consider?" "They are sottish children—a people of no understanding." There is no weighing of claims, or taking serious facts into account.

(2.) It implies *deadness of heart.* The motives on God's side towards all His creatures are so strong, that if there be any sensibility left in the heart at all, there must be some emotion awakened. That there should be none, implies the loss of the capacity for feeling.

(3.) It implies *aggravated guilt.* How offensive such a spectacle before a holy God. That such a worthless object should be embraced, a piece of dead matter, a thing made by its own worshipper, and an object surrounded with every possible vile association, that such an object should be preferred as a thing to be embraced and worshipped instead of the true and holy Jehovah, is indeed fitted to bring down some awful manifestation of the Divine anger.

CHAPTER IX.

ABIMELECH MADE KING.

Verses 1–21.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. And Abimelech.**] Some little time may have elapsed after Gideon's death, so that the air was again filled with tendencies to idolatry. Before certain acts can be done, the times must be ripe for them. *Abi* signifies "my father," *Melech* "a king." The name was probably given by the mother, who was probably a woman of energetic or aspiring spirit, if it is her character that we see reflected in her son. Probably, being an only son, she wished to make the most of the situation for him; and as her husband, though not *de jure*, was yet *de facto* king over the land, she determined to keep this fact as a mark before the eyes of her son day by day in his being always addressed by the words, "My father was a king."

Son of Jerubbaal.] How strange! that the man who earned the proud title of being the destroyer of Baal, should have a son who promised to be the most zealous supporter of Baal's interests in the land!

Went to Shechem.] A historical city, and one of the chief cities of Ephraim, from its central position and the many attractions of its situation. Here God first appeared to Abraham when he arrived in Canaan, and here Abraham first raised the altar (Gen. xii.); near this both Abraham and Jacob lie buried; between the two hills on which the city was built all Israel were assembled to hear the law read, in its blessings and curses, when they first entered the land of promise; here Israel's greatest captain most solemnly called on the people to stand firm by their covenant with Jehovah with his dying breath; and this was the place, and the well of Sychar the spot, where the Saviour's ever memorable conversation with the woman of Samaria took place. It is one of the oldest towns of Palestine.

The house of his mother's father.] Blood is thicker than water. Abimelech reckoned it better to have a surrounding of relatives than of general acquaintances.

2. Men of Shechem. Not the inhabitants generally, but the leading men—בַּעֲלֵי, the heads, those who had a *standing* in the town, either as regards property and therefore owners, or as regards guildry and so citizens—the guildry or burgesses. Hence we read elsewhere of "the men of Jericho," "the men of Keilah," etc. Or the reference may be to the Israelites, as opposed to the Canaanites.

Reign over you. He assumes that the people wished some one to be their king, and also that the thirst for rule was in the breasts of all Gideon's sons as well as in his own.

I am your bone and your flesh.] This is a subtle argument; it implies two things—(1) that he was of the same kindred with them (Gen. xxix. 14, 2 Sam. vi.), but also (2) "I have Ephraimite blood flowing in my veins, so that if you elect me to be king you will be giving Ephraim the sovereignty, and Manasseh shall no longer rule. Shechem will be the royal city, and Orphah will be eclipsed."

3 For they said, "He is our brother."] Abimelech had read well the dominating sentiment in the hearts of his people, for the bait at once took. They knew that the story about the brothers wishing to reign over them was false, but the pill was too temptingly gilded to be refused. They raised the shout at once for Abimelech.

4. 70 pieces of silver] or shekels—the shekel being two shillings of our money. This was all the price at which each head of Gideon's sons was valued! The money was given by the worshippers of Baal-berith, and doubtless was given willingly, when it was hinted that the use to be made of it was to destroy utterly the house of him who had destroyed Baal. Temple treasures were indeed often applied to political purposes [*Bertheau*]. I Kings xv. 18; II Kings xviii. 15-16. Small sum indeed, yet such soldiers might be got for trifling wages.

Vain and light persons] Vain means either those who were fond of dash and show, like Absalom's fifty men, who ran before him (II Sam. xvi), men who would not bear the yoke of any steady employment in the occupations of life, or men of no worth of character, and kept lounging about ready for any dark or foul deed that might come in their way. *Light* persons of no principle or conscience, unscrupulous desperadoes. These are sometimes called "Men of Belial" (II Sam. xx. i; I Kings xxi. 10).

5. Slew his brethren] in cold blood. They had committed no crime, but the usurper feared lest they should one day disturb him in his unlawful possession of the throne. Thus did Jehoram, the unworthy son of the good Jehosaphat (II Chron. xxi. 4). So did Jehu to the 70 sons of Ahab (II Kings x. 7), Athaliah to the seed royal of Judah (II Kings xi. 1), Baasha to the house of Jeroboam (I Kings xv. 29), and Zimri to the house of Baasha (I Kings xvi. 11, 12). Timour, on his conquest of Persia, destroyed the whole male family of the king. At the conquest of Bagdad he is said to have made a pyramid of 90,000 human heads. Even in modern Persia, it is said, until quite of late, to have been the custom for the new king either to kill, or to put out the eyes of all his brothers and near male relatives. Abimelech did indeed live in a barbarous age, and a sterner code prevailed then than now, yet we dare not do less than brand his conduct on this occasion as the atrocious act of an inhuman monster. Dim as was the light which the Israelitish religion shed on the value of human life compared with that which we now enjoy, it was sufficient to teach its worshippers to ostracise such a man, and put him beyond the pale of human fellowship. This system of wholesale murder of the innocents is one of the natural results of polygamy, and the lust of power.

6. House of Millo] not *family* as some make it, but *fortress*. It was in fact a large rampart or castle. Its walls were filled in with stones and earth. We hear of something similar in 2 Sam. v. 9, also 1 Kings ix. 15, 24; 2 Kings xii. 20 (see also ver. 46). The house of Millo, means probably those who garrisoned the fortress.

Gathered together and made Abimelech king.] The ruling class in Shechem, or the citizens, and those who belonged to the fortress, assembled. We hear of no dissentients, though such a dark tragedy had just been perpetrated, but, on the contrary, this assembly are unanimous in electing the man whose hands were reeking with the blood of so many of his brethren to be their king, that is to occupy the most exalted post of honour they could give him. What a picture of the times in even God's Israel! If anything could add to the frightful depravity of this whole transaction, it is to be told, that all this happened on, or around, the spot where stood *the oak of the pillar* (not "*the plain* of the pillar") or monumental stone under the oak, which Joshua set up as a witness of the solemn covenant, which the people entered into to take Jehovah alone to be their God (Josh. xxiv. 1, 26, 27—comp. also Gen. xxv. 4). As to the custom of holding councils under wide-spreading oaks in olden times, see Pict. Bible *in loco*. That the men of Shechem aided Abimelech in this slaughter of Gideon's family is manifest from ver. 24.

7. On the top of Mount Gerizim.] This hill stood on the south-west side of Shechem as a huge rock, about 800 feet above the valley below. The town, however, was not built at the bottom of the valley, but on one of the shoulders of the hill, and therefore not so far distant, but that a person speaking from the top of the rock might be heard by those in the town. The facilities for a person being heard, who might speak from the height to those below, were greatly increased by the fact, that there was another rock-hill immediately opposite, called Mount Ebal, which threw back the sound and sent it downwards (see Pict. Bible). (1 Sam. xxvi. 13; 2 Sam. ii. 25, 26.)

Jotham was told all that had taken place. The cruel blow aimed at Gideon's house called forth no protest. It was clear that Israel had fallen again into an idolatrous stupor. Every nerve of gratitude was deadened. Steps were taken to make the usurper king. He has only a few spirits left who are likeminded with himself, but the spirit of his father is still in him. The instinct of self-preservation is strong in him, but he will speak one firm and faithful word ere he disappear from view. He chooses his time and place—the rock Gerizim, and the

coronation-day of Abimelech. There, as the impersonation of conscience, he suddenly appears to the masses below to warn them of the heavy retribution, which such high-handed sins must bring down on their heads at no distant day. The speaker appeared, probably, on some projecting crag, near enough to be heard, yet distant enough to be not easily caught. The fact that he was supposed to be killed, while now he appears suddenly with a message of vengeance on his lips, at the supreme moment of the coronation, must have staggered all but the conscience-hardened in that guilty multitude.

This address ought to be called a fable, not a parable, for that never transgresses the limits of actual occurrences. [*Douglas.*] It is the oldest of all known fables, and was spoken 700 years before the days of Æsop, the most ancient of heathen fabulists. A similar one, though more brief, occurs in 2 Kings xiv. 9. Compare also the Agrippan fable, in Livy, Book 2, chap. 30, as to the rebellion of the members of the body against the belly. Of parables there are examples in 1 Kings xx. 39, 40, and especially 2 Sam. xii. 1-4; and xiv. 5-11. This was the most ancient instruction of any, for oftentimes it was only in this veiled form that wholesome truths could be conveyed to the ears of men of power, or those of the unreasoning multitude. Evils were thus reproved, and the multitude was admonished.

In this fable two things are put in contrast, and thus a severe censure is passed on the conduct of both Abimelech and his friends. The high character of Gideon's sons who had been slain, and the strong pretensions they might have put forward, while yet they stood quietly in the background, are contrasted with the rough character and worthless pretensions of the illegitimate son.

Jotham we believe spoke this message from God, so that we are to regard it as the fruit of Divine inspiration (see *Adam Clarke* at end of chap. ix; see also *Dr. Cassel* on chap. ix).

8. The trees went forth.] This states the matter in hand. The trees are supposed to want a king, and they go first to those that might respectably wear the dignity of the office. They begin with the *olive*, but the olive declines.

9. My fatness . . . they honour God and man.] It has excellent qualities, the one specially referred to here being its oil-producing power. This oil is used to consecrate both kings and priests; it also feeds the light that burns in the sanctuary of God. Thus it honours both God and man. Its leaf and branch are also signs of reconciliation and peace. Strong are the claims of the olive to reign, but it aspires not to that distinction. "Should I give up my vocation in bearing oil, that I might wave over the trees?"

11. Promoted over the trees.] The fig-tree is also invited and also declines. The word "promoted" means to shake, or *be shaken*. It seems to refer to the instability of royalty or worldly greatness, and the many cares and distractions that attend it.

13. That cheereth God and man.] This is hyperbolical language. The wine may be said to give delight to God, because He was always well pleased with the offerings of His people when they were presented in a right spirit, and in the appointed way. The hin of wine as a drink-offering came up with a sweet savour unto the Lord (Num. xv. 7, 10). The purport of these verses is, that should these trees—the olive, the fig, and the vine—comply with the request made, and occupy themselves with waving their branches over the other trees, it would take them away from the far more useful occupation of producing oil, and figs, and grapes.

14. The bramble.] The largest of thorns, with dreadful spikes like darts. It bears no fruit, has no leaves, and casts no shadow under which one might shelter himself from the burning heat of the sun. It is indeed not a tree, but a mere shrub, prickly, barren, base, and good for nothing, save to burn or kindle a fire. It is the symbol of a worthless man, who lives only to do harm. At the moment that Jotham was speaking, these trees filled the valley in profusion, and the brambles in large numbers were climbing up among the rocks.

15. The thornbush said to the trees, etc.] Thorns easily catch fire. If you do truly anoint me to be your king, then put your trust in my shadow. Spoken ironically, for shadow it has none. It refers to the hard character of Abimelech's rule. It must be a real submission. If not, the alternative will be that the bramble shall set fire to the other trees, not even excepting the noblest of them all—the cedars of Lebanon. For the most worthless man can do much harm to the most distinguished. He will have no mercy on rebels.

16 If ye have done truly and sincerely, etc.] Acted honestly and fairly with Jerubbaal and his house, then take your fill of joy over your newly made king, though it is only a thornbush you have got. This is said with a caustic irony and also with a bitter personal grief.

20. But if not.] If you have not acted fairly and properly by that house, then, as a righteous consequence, let fire break out between you mutually, from Abimelech to devour the men of Shechem and from these again to destroy Abimelech. There is a recompense which is meet for compacts which are entered into over falsehood, robbery, the shedding of innocent blood, and the exalting of false gods to the place of the true and only Jehovah.

21. Beer.] A place supposed to have been in the tribe of Benjamin. Jotham is not heard of more, but his words now spoken will not die till the end of time. It was something of the spirit of his father that spoke in him. How truly his words came to pass, the parties concerned on both sides knew to their dire experience, ere they were three years older. Abimelech began his reign, not on principles of truth and honour, justice and uprightness, but with open rebellion against Israel's Divine King, with assassination of those he was bound most sacredly to love, and with the fixed resolution to gain his own aggrandisement at whatever cost or ruin to those around him. With such a beginning, the end must be truly disastrous; nor was it long delayed.

MAIN HOMILETICS.—Verses 1-21.

THE ELECTION OF THE USURPER TO BE KING.

I. Contrasts in the history of God's own people.

This chapter, though a long one, contains a miserable history. Apart from names, it looks like the career of a roving bandit, who, setting the laws of God and man alike at defiance, could commit with cool barbarity the most unnatural crimes, to gratify an inordinate lust of power. Yet the first line reminds us that Abimelech, the actor in this tragedy, was the son of Jerubbaal. What a deplorable sequel to the glorious sun-setting recorded at the close of the previous chapter! The "gold has become dim indeed, and the most fine gold is changed." As the gloomiest of nights sometimes follows the brightest of days, so does the short and reckless career of this unprincipled young man follow the long and honourable course of life of Israel's greatest hero. In passing from the one chapter to the other, it seems as if we had dropped all at once, from the highest pinnacle of Solomon's temple, which overlooked all the glories of that matchless building, and had fallen down among the dead bones, the disgusting offal, and many abominations of the valley of Hinnom, which required the constant action of fire to prevent the atmosphere from being poisoned.

Striking contrasts occur also at different intervals in the history of this people, both before and after this period. One occurs in comparing the generation that conquered Canaan under Joshua, in the exercise of a strong faith in their covenant God, with the degenerate generation of their descendants, who could not drive out the Canaanites, from the want of that faith, but permitted them to dwell among them, and, ere long, they intermarried with the idolaters, and became as they were. We have another case, in the few thousands who followed the guilty king of Israel, trembling through the land in the days of Saul, compared with the lion-like host that gathered around David shortly afterwards, and went on conquering and to conquer.

The contrast of such a history as that of Abimelech following that of so excellent a man as Gideon, teaches several lessons, such as—

(1.) *It was a punishment on the people for their misimprovement of so just a rule as that of Gideon.* To have had such a man bearing rule among them, and placed at the top of society for so long a time, was a great privilege conferred by the God of Providence on His chosen people. But they seem to have had no eye to see the Divine mercy extended to them. They did not realise that there was any favour being shown to them; when at last God withdrew His Gideon, and sent them an Abimelech. Between these the people soon found, to their bitter experience, there was the difference between ar angel of light, and a demon of darkness.

(2.) *The thoroughly corrupt state of the people of God apart from renewing grace.* Israel was really no better in character before God than the members of any other nation. "By nature they, too, were children of wrath, even as others." There was "in them the same evil heart of unbelief, departing from the living God." The renewing grace of God alone made the difference. "What, then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise; for we have already proved, both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." (*See* also Eph. ii. 3.) It was but a few centuries before this when Job wrote these words, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." And Bildad responded, "How can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" And it was but a few generations subsequent to this when David wrote thus, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Create in me a clean heart, renew a right spirit within me." (Ps. xl. 12; Ezek. xxxvi. 26-7.)

These Israelites proved that when Gideon was no more, and the only remaining barrier removed out of the way, they could run on headlong in the old idolatrous course as before, keeping pace with any of the Canaanite nations themselves. As for Abimelech, we believe, were all the habitations of these native idolaters searched to find a character worse than his fellows, it would have been impossible to discover a monster in human form more detestable than we have in this son of Jerubbaal. And as for the people in general, we never read of any generation among them growing up in righteousness and the fear of God, as an essential part of their character, to whom, therefore, it was unnatural to be guilty of sin. There was no generation of Israel without their sins against the God of Israel. Had there been so, how meaningless to them would have been the elaborate ceremonial of their sanctuary service!

(3.) *God's mercy is not like man's in the measure of its forbearance.* Were but half the provocation which men are giving every day to God to be given to each other, they would instantly bring down on the heads of the transgressors the full vials of their wrath. Man's patience is so soon exhausted; God's patience is like Himself, inexhaustible (Mal. iii. 6). That patience is not even exhausted when He leaves the sinner, or when He proceeds to inflict on him the sentence of doom. His course usually is, to wait long enough till mercy has had full display, and till it be shown that He is not willing that any should perish, but rather come to repentance, and live; but if that long and patient dealing is made in vain, a time must come, when reasons of righteousness and wisdom require that sin be dealt with as it deserves, and that justice be allowed to take its course. Yet patience is not properly exhausted.

(4.) *The deep debt of gratitude every saved man owes to the grace of God.* It was a wise habit of the good John Bradford to say, when he saw any very striking personification of human wickedness in the worst of men around him—"There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God." And well might any believer in the doctrine of renewing grace have said, when he saw this wicked young man going on in a career of unbridled sin—"There goes I, myself, but for the grace of God." Meaning that he, too, has a wicked heart by nature, and that it requires to be made the subject of God's renewing grace, ere it become fit for entering the holy world above. For we are to judge character, not by the measure of its present development, but by the direction it is taking. The development is now rapidly going on, and ere long it will reach a point or degree in wickedness, which at one time would have astonished the man himself, could he have foreseen it. Thus it was with Hazael, when the prophet foretold him of the atrocities, of which he would one day be guilty towards the people of God. "Is thy servant a dog," he exclaimed, when the prophet held up to him the picture of his future deeds, "that he should do this thing?" He was

at that time horrified at the thought of perpetrating such cruelties; yet, some years afterwards, as his wicked character became developed, he showed by the fact, that he could do all that the prophet predicted.

To every saved man who enters the world of perfect purity and bliss, it will be made clear, as with a thousand sunbeams, that it is not to any supposed goodness of his own, or to any worth in his own works, that he owes his admission to that bright home. All the outbreaks of depravity of which he has been conscious, from day to day during his whole life, and these occurring in the face of every possible restraint, will be as so many strong lights to flash on him the conviction, that it is by grace alone that he is saved—that salvation is not the thing which he deserves, but that which God is loving enough through Christ to give.

II. The best of fathers may have the worst of sons. This is another truth suggested by the paragraph (see pp. 95, 96).

(1.) *No good father can impart his renewed nature to his son.* What the father is by nature, he may, and does, more or less, convey to his son. The conditions of his body, its healthy or sickly state, whether it is strong or weak, its character in other respects, the father's temperaments, his likeness, his natural dispositions and tendencies, his constitutional peculiarities, with other features, but above all his fallen spiritual condition, both in his depraved desires and affections, and in his liability to condemnation as a guilty being—these the parent confers more or less on the child. "Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image" (Gen. v. 3). It is not said "after God's likeness and in His image," as in the case of Adam himself (chap. v). To grant the renewed nature is a thing in God's special gift; and so we are expressly informed, that all who become "sons of God" are made so directly by God Himself. They are "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 13). *Not indeed without the use of means,* for we are expressly told in the previous verse, that it is those who "receive Christ and believe in His name," that are honoured with the privilege of being made sons of God (comp. also Gal. iv. 4-6; John iii. 5).

(2.) *A good father may often neglect the training of his child.* The child of a pious parent, though he derive no advantage directly in his natural birth, is yet open to many advantages otherwise—in respect of example, of superintendence and training, of prayers many and sincere, of special promises, and mixing with the fellowship of the righteous, to which might be added a fuller and more regular enjoyment of the means of grace. Thus a good man may have the formation of his son's character in a great measure in his own hands; that is, so far as means are concerned.

Yet we often know that, as a matter of fact, a pious father sometimes neglects the proper upbringing of his son; as did *Eli*, when "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not;" and as did *David*, when he "never said to Adonijah, what doest thou?" If the tree, when it is young, is permitted to grow up crooked and misshapen, it will remain crooked and misshapen during its whole existence. So is it with the child, "Trained up in the way that it should go, when it is of mature age, it will not depart from it." But, if neglected as to training and the use of means, the result desired cannot be expected, even if many prayers from a godly father should be laid on the altar. Thus it was with Absalom, and thus it was with Abimelech.

3. *A perverse son may receive a wicked training away from his pious father's eye.* Thus it was apparently with Abimelech. His mother seems to have had most to do with his training, and she was a Canaanite and idolater. He would naturally be kept separate from the other sons, who were all children

of Israelitish mothers, and must have regarded Abimelech as a son of the bond-woman. Thus he was cradled in an idolatrous circle in reality, though this was concealed from the public eye by the fact that Gideon was his father, and that, during the season of his youth he lived in his father's house. Naturally also, he would attract to himself idolatrous companions, of whom there were only too many everywhere, notwithstanding all that Gideon could do to reduce the number. These were the circumstances that determined the general aspect of his religious character. His natural force of action, selfwilledness, and towering ambition would do all the rest. Hence we have in him one of the worst characters in Scripture history. We do not find in the picture one single redeeming element, and there is scarcely a single element of wickedness awanting.

4. The course of Gideon's son was one of unmitigated wickedness.

(1.) He begins with *casting off all fear of God.* "Conscience must be either satisfied or seared, if a man would act with thorough decision," says a wise thinker. Abimelech chose the latter course; and, as the most effectual way to sear it, he would not recognise the existence of the true God at all.

(2.) He dares to *usurp the sacred seat which was reserved for Jehovah alone,* in being king over His chosen people. Had this been merely a vacant secular throne, like one of those on which any of the other kings of the earth sat, it had even then been an act of impertinent presumption, when there were 70 persons, of far more legitimate title than he possessed, ready to occupy it if necessary. But the act becomes one of daring irreverence, when, without warrant, and in the face of a direct prohibition from the jealous Jehovah, he thrusts himself into the holiest office on earth, except that of the High Priest alone, if indeed that is to be excepted.

(3.) *Self-aggrandisement was his only object.* He could not assign a single reason of right or of merit for what he had done. On the contrary, his character was so full of blemishes, that to exalt him to a throne was the last thought that would have occurred to other minds, had he not made the suggestion himself. Self-worship is the meanest of all kinds of idolatry, and for a man to push himself forward to occupy the first place, when he ought to take the last, only exposes his memory to infamy in the future. Yet with him every sacred interest was cast to the winds to gratify an inordinate ambition.

(4.) His first step to accomplish his purpose is *falsehood.* He insinuates that Gideon's sons were, each and all, ambitious to become king in Israel, and that matters had gone so far that the men of Israel must make their choice—the fact being, that in no breast save his own was any such thought cherished.

(5.) His second step is to *hire money from the headquarters of idolatry* to *serve his wicked purposes* (v. 4). "This was like going to the forge of Satan to find means to kill the servants of Jehovah" (*Trapp*).

(6.) His third step was to *make bosom friends of the vilest of characters.* If a man is to be judged by the company he keeps, what can we think of the son of the noblest man in Israel choosing for his associates the desperadoes of society! In place of saying, as a true son of Gideon ought to do, "Gather not my soul with sinners, &c.," we see him looking about for characters vile enough to assist him in accomplishing his Satanic devices.

(7.) His fourth step, and the darkest of all, is to *commit murder wholesale on the family of his father.* As if it were a light thing to take the life of one brother, another, and another follow, until 70 lives are taken—all sons of his father, and every son he had—every one of them innocent, and an utter stranger to the thought of aspiring to the crown of Israel! How expensive is the work of sin!

Blood must flow in streams, and the nearest relatives must be sacrificed, ere its ends can be attained!

(8.) *Finally, he gets himself elected King by an apostate city, in the interests of idolatry.* The Shechemites utter no protest against the hydra-headed crime, but rather strengthen the perpetrator's hands for its commission, and even regard it as a recommendation for their suffrages, that he had destroyed the house of him who had destroyed Baal. Say not that a man's religious belief has nothing to do with the colour of his conduct. Like king, like people!

Examples of more decidedly opposite characters are not to be found in the Book of God, than those of Gideon and his son Abimelech. They are wide as the poles asunder. We can hardly imagine how such a son could be reared under such a paternal roof. But it forms a palpable condemnation of Gideon's sin, in having married a Canaanite.

III. Useful purposes are served in recording a wicked man's life in the Book of God.

It might be said, such a record would only be a blur on the page. And it might farther be objected, that, as the name of the wicked is destined to rot, it seems inconsistent with this to inscribe it in the book of true immortality. But—

1. *The record is given as a curse and not as a blessing.* Gladly would the wicked man hail the announcement that his deeds were not to be recorded. It would be accepted by him as a valuable boon, that his name were allowed to lie in perpetual oblivion. But God puts a brand on it, and holds it up to the execration of all coming time. It was so with Cain, when a mark was set upon him; so with Ahaz, when the finger was pointed emphatically to his sin (2 Chron. xxviii. 22); so with Jezebel, Pharaoh, Judas, etc. Their names go down to posterity, with a character of infamy indelibly stamped on them. Thus they are made a mark for perpetual hissing to the whole world of men in after times. Gladly would the wicked dead continue to lie in their graves if they could, when the great voice is heard, "Let the earth and sea give up their dead." For when they awake it will be "to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. xii. 2). How beautiful is the reverse experience of those who accept of the Saviour, and trust in His glorious redemption—"your sins and iniquities will I remember no more." The man is blessed "whose sin is covered" (Ps. xxxii. 1).

2. Such a record *illustrates the truth of God's testimony respecting human character.* It is put down "that God may be justified when He speaks, and clear when He judges." Has He said that "the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;" in this dark history is the proof—has He said, "there is no fear of God before the wicked man's eyes," "his mouth is full of cursing, deceit, and fraud, etc." (Ps. x. 7–11); in such a history as that here set down we see it all realised.

3. It shows *by practical example the frightfully evil nature of sin when allowed to develop itself unchecked.* It is a frightful thing for a creature to give up his Creator, as all sin implies. The consequences cannot fail to be of the most serious character. There must be a fearful perversion of his moral nature, in abandoning a fellowship so pure, in despising a friendship so essential to his happiness, in violating an authority so sacred, and in wantonly forsaking the infinitely Good One. The immediate effect must be to come under the Divine frown, and to lose the Divine image. According to the excellence of the object despised, so must be the deep-rootedness of the evil disposition in the heart that rejects it. And as the law of progress applies to character, the

longer this disposition is cherished, or the more unreservedly it is brought into exercise, it must become more and more inveterate. "Sin becomes exceeding sinful," and more and more sinful (Rom. vii. 13).

In Abimelech we see sin developing itself unchecked. He throws the reins on his lusts, especially his lust of power, and we see before us a monster rather than a man. For here there is everything to shock the moral sense. An exhibition is made of what sin naturally leads to, when allowed to operate without restraint. It turns man into an evil spirit, it makes a fearful wreck of our moral nature. This illustrates the greatness of the deliverance wrought by the Saviour, when "He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

4. *Wicked deeds recorded are beacons set up, to warn us off from the rocks and whirlpools of sin.* They show that a course of sin is like sailing among sunk rocks, or falling under the destructive sweep of a vortex. The full malignity of sin is not to be told in words, but has to be seen in acts. It is a headlong rush, a maddening rage, "a possession of seven devils," a bursting through all bounds, a rampant and reckless career of treading under foot the sacred commands of the Most High—as seen in the chapter of life here recorded. Abimelech is a finger post set up in God's Providence, with the words inscribed, "Beware of the broad road that leadeth to destruction!" When allowed full scope, it becomes so virulent, that almost every word in the vocabulary which is expressive of an evil quality would be required to tell its many sides and degrees of evil. It is venomous and baneful, a desolating scourge, a withering blight. It is savage in its conceptions against the innocent, and merciless in carrying its designs into execution. It is a destructive force marring and crushing everything that comes in its way—corrupting, corroding and polluting whatever is most fertile and beautiful in God's world.

All this exhibited in actual life is a most emphatic testimony, that "the end of these ways is death," and carries in its bosom the warning, "Avoid the evil way, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."

IV. God can bring accusers against the wicked when they fancy themselves most secure.

On the very coronation day, when this vile aspirant to the throne of Israel had just got the consummation of all his wishes gratified, and saw himself hailed by the thousands of one of the chief cities of the land as their king, suddenly a messenger from Jehovah appears on the scene with the language of solemn warning on his lips. It was as if the very rocks were made to cry out against such hideous wickedness. Had his heart been less hard, Abimelech could, like Herod after the murder of John (Mark vi. 16), have exclaimed—"This is one of my brothers whom I have put to death." Standing on an eminence among the rocks which overhung the valley, one of the seventy sons, all of whom were supposed to have been massacred, appears, as if risen from the dead, to act the part of an accusing conscience. The occasion was so strong, that the very Mount of Blessing (Gerizim, where Jotham stood) must for once thunder out a curse, against the perpetrators of the awful deeds, which had that day culminated in the unheard of act, of an impious mortal rushing forward to occupy the throne which, of all others, was reserved for the God of Israel alone!

Thus did God meet *Adam*, on the very day when he sinned, and hid himself among the trees of the garden. Thus suddenly was *Haman* caught in a snare by that very queen who had honoured him by inviting him to a special banquet, where none but the king, queen, and Haman were present. At the moment when his proud wishes were being gratified to the full, his fall came swiftly—in

the twinkling of an eye, from a hand that he least of all expected. So did *Ahab* encounter Elijah, at the very moment he entered to take possession of that long-coveted vineyard of Naboth. At the moment, when the man, who tried to crush the Church of God in its infancy, was receiving honours from the people as a god, "the angel of the Lord smote him, and he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost" (Acts xii. 21–23; Job xx. 23; Hab. ii. 11; 2 Kings v. 26; Josh. vii. 18–21).

V. Silent nature is full of lessons of wisdom for irrational men. It needs only a Jotham to bring them out, and apply them. Long before our poet told us in words, there were—

> "Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
> Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

"Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee—or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee," etc. (Job xii. 7–9). If the *fable* (which this paragraph is supposed to be) be the work of fancy, or a narrative woven by fancy from the elements of nature, in order to press home some important truth, it is not the less instructive; for nature is in all its aspects essentially a teacher. It not only contains illustrations of spiritual truth, happy but accidental likenesses of it, but its very framework is so constructed, as to furnish emblems to the eye of sense of the great spiritual meaning which lies in the background. The world of spirit which is unseen, and which existed before the material world, repeats itself in that world; so that, what we see in nature is the counterpart of what exists in the realm of spirits. It bears witness for that realm, and shadows it forth. Man's body is so fashioned, as to shadow forth in its curves and features and noble upright form, especially too in its expression of the countenance, the higher qualities of his spirit. In some sense, "the things of earth are the copies of things in heaven." The objects in the mart, by the wayside, or in the field, are instruments through which man is educated to know much more of God. "This entire visible world, with its kings and subjects, parents and children, sun and moon, sowing and harvest, light and darkness, life and death, is a mighty parable—a great teaching of supersensuous truth, a help at once to our faith, and our understanding."

Lessons Taught us by the Trees.

1. *Humility.* None of the really good trees aspire to have a distinction above the others. They are content to remain in the place where their Creator has put them. The lofty and umbrageous tree does not boast itself above those that are small and tender, but rather flings its arms around them to shelter them.
2. *Sense of responsibility.* Each tree feels it has an office to fulfil, which is specially given to it to do, and which it must not leave undone.
3. *Obedience and submission.* There is no rebellion among the trees, against the authority of Him who appointed them their places, and assigned them their duties. That which is scantily laden, or bears a more common sort of fruit, does not murmur because it is not covered with rich clusters; but each seems content to bear that which is expected of it. It is obedient and submissive.
4. *Mutual good-will.* No tree wishes to despoil another tree of its glory. There is no joining together of those that are less favoured, against those that are renowned for fertility and beauty. There is neither a strife for precedence, nor do the others show jealousy, if any one is likely to have the precedence. So

ought it to be among men of all classes, but especially among those who form the Church of God. All should feel they have the same nature, are trees planted by the same hand, watered by the same clouds, and warmed by the same sun; and so, being united by many ties in common, should grow peaceably together as one vineyard of the Lord of Hosts.

5. *Entire dependence of each on the provision God has made for it.* It is but in a secondary manner, that any one tree derives benefit from another. One may to some extent protect another from the fury of the blast, or contribute to it somewhat of heat. But all the primary conditions of health and strength to any tree, belong to the soil in which it is placed, to the air around it, to the sun that shines upon it, and to the rain or dew that falls upon it. Its root must be fastened in the soil, and on that everything depends in the first instance. The soil must be sufficient and rich in order to a luxuriant growth. The rain and dew must fall copiously, and the sun must send forth heat. In the spiritual vineyard these conditions are essentially required. Fellow Christians may in many ways be helpful to each other, but each one is dependent, for all that is primary, on God alone. Each one is rooted by God's own hand in Christ, and built up in him; it is from Him that the rain and due of spiritual influences come down; and it is he who causes the Sun of Righteousness to arise with warmth and healing in his beams (Gal. i. 15, 16; Col. ii. 6, 7; Hos. xiv. 5, xliv. 3, 4; Mal. iv. 2). The great practical lesson taught by the trees therefore is, that the Christian's primary duty is to look after his relations to his God, and see that these are all right, for it is on *that* that all which is essential to his growth depends.

VI.—To be useful is better than to reign.

All the good trees gave it as a reason for their refusal to wave their tops over the other trees, that they had each a useful vocation to fulfil, and, that the fulfilment of that vocation was a far more important thing, than to reign over others. To reign, is to live for the glorification of one's self; to be useful, is to be a fountain head from which blessings might flow out to others. All the objects of Nature seem to say, we exist not for ourselves, but for the benefit of others around us. The sun shines not for itself, but to enlighten and warm the planets that revolve around him. The clouds float in the firmament, not on their own account, but to distil their watery treasures on the thirsty ground. The birds sing among the branches, and fill the grove with melody, to give delight to many a listening ear. The flowers put forth their blossom, and convey a pleasing sense of view to the eye; while the trees and shrubs grow, and wave their branches in the breeze, not on their own account, but to glorify Him who created them, for the gracefulness of their form, the richness of their hues, the sweet fragrance they emit, or the excellent fruit they bear.

It is the law also for all true Christians—"None of us liveth to himself," &c., "Ye are the salt of the earth," "Ye are the light of the world." And the rule they have to follow is, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Rom. xiv. 7, 8; Matt. v. 13, 14; Acts xx. 35). He who lives to do good to others around him, and especially to advance the cause of God on the earth, has the consciousness that he lives not in vain, that he is not a cypher but a valuable integer in society, that he is spending the talents given to him to a profitable account—with the two gaining other two—that he has thought more of God's glory while passing through the world than of his own, and that his place will be missed when he is gone.

CHAPTER IX.

ABIMELECH'S TRAGIC BUT BRIEF HISTORY.

(Verses 22–57.)

CRITICAL NOTES.—22. Had reigned] ruled by *force* rather than by *natural right*, implying a hard, as opposed to a mild, rule. **Over Israel].** Shechem in some measure represented Ephraim, and Ephraim in some degree represented Israel. Where one is active, and has a strong will, among many who are passive, his ascendency is practically acknowledged.

23. God sent an evil spirit] not evil temper or disposition, but a *wicked spirit*, which stirred up evil dispositions, discords, and insurrections, ending in bloodshed (comp. I. Sam. xvi. 14, 15; xviii. 10). In what took place, we see not only the action of those evil passions that gender strifes, but also the controlling and directing influence of the Moral Governor of the world. There was the intention of a Personal Ruler to punish high-handed crime in a manner suited to its character. If the evil feeling which led to the sad issues were in men's hearts already, it was God that fixed the time for the awakening of these feelings, and directed them to produce these issues in the end, in the exercise of His moral government. The Shechemites were led to break their oath of fidelity to him whom they had chosen to be their king. Though at the moment they endorsed the strong act by which he had effectually cleared the way of all competitors for the throne, yet now after three years' experience of the rigorous rule of the bramble king, they no doubt began to feel some remorse for their wicked conduct, in having been co-partners in his infamous deed.

24. *That their blood might be laid upon Abimelech . . . and on the men of Shechem.* So it usually is in the course of Providence (comp. I. Kings ii. 32; Ps. vii. 16; Matt. xxiii. 35, 36; Esth. ix. 25). "He maketh inquisition for blood." "He beholdeth mischief to requite it with His hand." All the events that followed were permitted by God, and overruled by Him, to bring down suitable retribution both on Abimelech and his partners in crime. The Shechemites wished to make themselves the rallying point of the nation by making Abimelech king, and they had other interests of their own to serve. But they quickly found, that, while they thought they were making use of him to serve selfish purposes of their own, he was actually making use of them as his tools. At length they resolved that, as he had played falsely by them in his general conduct, they, from being sworn friends, would now turn round and become deceitful foes.

25. Set liers in wait for him, etc.] *i.e.*, during his absence. Probably, he was at that moment trying to extend his rule over other places. Supposing he might return attended only by a few followers, and unsuspicious of danger, they placed a number of men in ambush so as if possible to take him prisoner, for they were afraid to face him when on his guard and in the open field. Meantime these "liers in wait" commited acts of brigandage on all travellers as they passed along the mountains, which at once showed their character, and also perhaps a design to make it known that the country was getting disorganised under Abimelech's rule.

26 Gaal, the son of Ebed,] *i.e.*, the son of a servant. He was so by the father's side, as Abimelech was by the mother's side. He too, like the latter, was a Canaanite. Both were morally and socially base in their origin. The appearance of two such men in the front rank indicated, that in these days "vile men were high in place." It was a case of bramble contesting superiority with bramble. Gaal was probably something of a knight errant, or a chieftain at the head of a company of freebooters, or brigand chief. That such an adventurer should now turn up so unexpectedly, and be able all at once to command so much influence with the masses, was a sign of the evil days that had happened to Israel. The men of worth and of weight have disappeared from society; such nuisances as a Gaal or a Zebul are the rival claimants for the honours of the day; an Abimelech is the chosen king of one of the principal cities of Israel; while public robbery, treachery and disorder overspread the land.

Gaal is judged unworthy of having many particulars given about him, and so he quickly passes across the stage with no more notice taken of him than what is necessary, to show how low Israel's history at this period had sunk. His appearing on the surface only proves that when base deeds are to be done, there is always someone starting up who is base enough to do them. In this upstart the men of Shechem actually put confidence as a leader.

27. Gathered their vineyards and trode the grapes.] It was the season of vintage. At such a season, it was customary even for the heathen to keep some festival to the god they worshipped, as an act of thanksgiving for his granting them a bountiful harvest. The literal rendering is, they made *praise offerings* or thank-offerings, along with praise songs. That such a service of

joy and thanksgiving was required to be observed among the Israelites, is clear from such passages as Lev. xxiii. 24; Deut. xvi. 10, 11; Isa. ix. 3. The offerings were of the fruits produced by the vineyards in the fourth year. But the Shechemites transferred to their god Baalberith, what should have been rendered to Jehovah.

Went into the house of their god.] The history of Israel in its deepest meaning, is the history of the true God fighting against all the false gods which men worship, and exposing their utter insufficiency.

They did eat and drink and cursed Abimelech.] How general the sin of drunkenness. Even in the earliest days of human history we see the blighting effects of it, and that in the case of Noah himself, ere he had time to settle down after coming out of the ark. And we see it now, like the opening mouth of a volcano, ready to pour its destructive streams on every side. To curse their ruler, in defiance of the law laid down (Ex. xxii. 28; II. Sam. xix. 21; Isa. viii. 21), was the first evil effect and led on to worse. Thus it was among the heathen; at the feasts of Bacchus among the Romans, and at similar festivals among the Greeks, and other peoples. The harvest home was an occasion celebrated with banqueting and songs of rejoicing. But how often did those occasions, which might have been harmless and cheerful, become, through indulgence, the means of producing the deepest sorrow and woe!

28. And Gaal said, who is Abimelech, etc.] What is to be noted here, is the contrast between the present jubilant strain of merriment, and the tragic issue which anyone might see could not be far off, when such a man as Abimelech was to be dealt with. What a difference between the lighthearted braggartism of the revellers of to-day, while the enemy was at a safe distance, and the pallid terror of the cowards on the morrow, when the lion really appeared. Hitherto they had been too much cowed by the stern spirit, and energetic action, of their tyrant ruler, to do more than speak in whispers, and express their thoughts by signs. But now being treated with wine, and the object of their dread being beyond the hills, they could name him as a despot, and utter curses both loud and deep against his despotic sway.

Now was the time for this base upstart to step forward, when men of worth were hanging their heads with shame. If Gaal had courage for nothing else, he was bold enough to set all laws of decency and propriety at defiance, by proposing himself to be ruler in place of Abimelech. It was time to strike the iron, when he saw them begin to curse Abimelech. Accordingly he shouts out defiantly, "Who is this Abimelech, whom you have allowed to get the upper hand of you—this man who adopts to himself the title of Shechem, as if he were the only person who could speak or move there?" This is said contemptuously, and when, being well out of harm's way, the speaker could afford to use treasonable language. Some would make the word *Shechem* apply to the people of the town, or even to Zebul. It is more natural to suppose, that one and the same person is alluded to in the language, for it was customary to address the same person by a double name, as may be seen in the parallel passages (I. Sam. xxv. 10; I. Kings xii. 16). "Is he not a son of the man who boasted against your god, and though he proudly usurps the name of your town as his own, was not his mother a bondwoman, and no true descendant of Hamor, the father of your clan? And Zebul, who now rules over you, is but his officer in his absence, who has no other claim to advance. Your wisdom is to serve the true stock of the children of Hamor, and not this low caste usurper."

29. Would to God this people were under my hand.] This thought was what was uppermost in his heart all the time, but he did not dare at first to bring it out. Probably he waited to see if anyone else would make the proposal, but as none did, he, as if speaking aloud to himself, ventures the proposal himself. He puts it as if it were a special favour, and act of kindness done to the Shechemites, for him to take the command over them, and restore prosperity to their city. Since no one seemed to oppose the proposal, he takes for granted that it is carried, and proceeds to act accordingly. The great thing to be done is first to remove Abimelech. Accordingly a message of defiance is sent to the tyrant king, which was the most likely thing to unite the men of the city around Gaal and his company.

30. And when Zebul heard the words of Gaal, etc.] Though these words were spoken amid a scene of dissipation, they were resented by Zebul, who whether a warm adherent of Abimelech or not, was deeply offended at being regarded as his tool, and also at being marked out for destruction equally with his master. Hence he sends secret reports of how matters are going to Abimelech.

32. Up by night, thou, and the people that are with thee.] Zebul, from these verses, and from the whole account, seems to have been a man of considerable shrewdness but how tame any character becomes, that is so sadly wanting in the higher moral qualities

35. And Gaal went out and stood at the gate.] Doubtless he would suppose, that someone may have conveyed information to Abimelech of what was going on; and now he came to see whether the way was clear. Besides he had sent a challenge to Abimelech. Meanwhile, Abimelech was acting on Zebul's instructions, and was lying in wait to enter the city, so soon as Gaal should have left it. But the latter was getting more cautious, or timid, as danger approached, and was now only feeling his way.

36. There come people down from the top of the mountains.] Zebul had not till now openly opposed Gaal, for the great body of the Shechemites appeared to be opposed to Abimelech. He therefore thought it better to temporise for a time. Zebul knew very well, that the figures on the mountain were real men, but wished to put Gaal off the tack of thinking so (who was a man of much less sharpness of discernment), in order to gain time for Abimelech's four companies to effect a junction.

37. There come people down by the middle—the elevated centre of the land.] Meonenim—the Wizard's Oak—a place where these idolatrous soldiers may have looked for omens as to their success.

38. Where is now thy mouth, etc.] A little time had been gained for the approach of Abimelech's troops while Gaal continued inactive. The treacherous Zebul now throws off his mask, and bitterly taunts his rival with the boastful language he had used in Abimelech's absence, ending with a challenge to him to fight his adversary in the open field, now that he was actually come. It is thus that Satan deludes his dupes in making them imagine there is no such thing as a pit of perdition. It is only a "shadow," a mere figure of speech. Thus he temporises, until the time comes for transfixing the culprit with the arrow of an accusing conscience, and then he taunts him with a malicious sneer, while he writhes in his agony (Matt. xxvii. 4).

39. Gaal went out before the men of Shechem.] At the head of the men of Shechem, for his whole drift was to enlist them on his side, and having already publicly dared to curse Abimelech they were no longer neutral.

40. Unto the entering in of the gate] but could not pass through the gates, when they were shut against him in time.

41. Dwelt at Arumah.] Remained יָשַׁב *sat down*, not dwelt for any length of time, continued for the day at Arumah. **Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren.]** When it was manifest that Gaal was no match for Abimelech, the Shechemites fell from him, and Zebul took advantage of the moment of his weakness, to thrust him out of the town altogether. From this moment, we hear no more of him. He disappears as one who goes down no more to rise. Zebul also is seen no more. He fades from public view the moment his master comes to the front.

42. The people went out into the field] probably for the purpose of resuming their harvesting work. They supposed there could now be no longer any trouble, seeing that Gaal had been thrust out from their midst, and Abimelech's authority was restored. But the wrath of the bramble king was not to be so easily pacified. All the night long he had been meditating farther revenge on those who had dared to revolt from him; and, expecting that the people of the town would have to resume their field operations, he laid a trap for them accordingly. Dividing his men into three companies, with one company he seized the gate, and the other two companies he employed to make a regular massacre among the people, as they fled in all directions across the plain.

45. Slew the people, beat down the city, and sowed it with salt. In this the human tiger went beyond his usual mark. It is as if a king were to slay all his subjects, and then rase his capital to its foundations, that it might not be known ever such a place had existed. This meant more than merely condemning Shechem for the future to a state of comparative infertility. For the sowing of salt on the surface of the ground could not absolutely prevent all growth. But salt was the symbol of any covenant which the people made with their god, and when for the breach of that covenant salt was employed, it meant that such a people came under the curse of their god. These Shechemites had made a covenant, in the house of their god (Baalberith), to be faithful subjects to Abimelech as their king; and now that that covenant was broken, he brings over their city the sign of the curse. Infidelity to such covenants was reckoned the greatest of crimes, and was understood to mean that they were devoted to destruction.

When Milan was taken (A.D. 1162) it was sowed with salt. At the massacre of St. Bartholomew (A.D. 1572) the house of Admiral Coligny, after he was murdered, was sown with salt (see illustrations in Mic. iii. 12; Ps. cvii. 34; Jer. xvii. 6; Deut. xxix. 23).

46. When the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, etc.] *i.e.*, the same with the "house of Millo" in ver. 6. Their numbers were now so reduced, while Abimelech was still as strong as ever, and roused to fury like an unchained lion, that they abandoned all resistance, and thought only of betaking themselves to the best place of security they could find. There was only one place they could run to with any hope of getting safety—the house of their god, called in Canaanite language Baalberith, but in that of the Israelites, Elberith. This was a stronghold—in the special sense, that those who were in it were understood to be under the special protection of their god. But there was also a fortified enclosure within it, which might be called their *safe*, where their money and treasures were preserved. This was the upper chambers of a lofty tower. The same word is used in I. Sam. xiii. 6, where it means the topmost portion of inaccesible rocks.

48. He gat him up to Mount Zalmon.] Abimelech now supposed that he had got a fit opportunity of carrying out his whole thought of revenge upon the rebels at once. When they were all brought together into one place, and in a helpless condition, it was easy to destroy them at one blow. Like Nero, afterwards, who wished that all the people of Rome should have but one neck, that he might have the pleasure of cutting off their heads at one stroke, so, now, this human fiend was glad to find that all the people of Shechem who were left, were gathered together into one bundle, that he might have the satisfaction of consuming them by one holocaust.

To raise a conflagration around them occurred to him as the readiest method of accomplishing their ruin. Hence he repairs to the thicket of Zalmon, in the immediate neighbourhood, a mountain covered with wood, which has been called a "Black Forest" [*Luther*], though some have identified it with Ebal, [*Stanley*]. (Ps. lxviii. 14). The reference in the Psalm is to the snow which sometimes rested on its top, and appeared the more striking, because of its contrast with the thick shade of wood that covered its sides. There was no difficulty in finding fuel sufficient for the purpose. Each man had but to carry one branch, and 1,000 men would have brought 1,000 branches. He himself set the example, axe in hand, cutting down his branch and setting it in order. Every man was invited to do the same, by which not only was fuel provided, but also a test was applied to ascertain whether all were faithful to their leader.

49. All the people likewise cut down, etc.] All complied, for where there is a strong will in action, other wills naturally yield to its decisions. The wood was applied to the hold, and as a portion of it appears to have been of wood, it was soon enveloped amid the flames, and every man within the walls met with a horrible death. So true to the letter was Jotham's curse fulfilled (ver. 20).

50. Thebez] now called *Tubas*, a small town about 13 miles north from Shechem. This town seems to have joined with Shechem in throwing off the yoke of Abimelech, and as this ferocious despot knew no limit to his malice short of extermination, when his lordly will was crossed, he now proceeded to do to Thebez as he had done to Shechem. This town appears to have been built in circular form, with a tower in the centre, many missiles being gathered on the top. To the highest part of this tower all the inhabitants fled for refuge, fastening every entrance securely behind them. Abimelech himself headed the attack. Being in a frenzy of rage he became regardless of the danger arising from showers of missiles thrown by the besieged. So it happened, that while fighting furiously in the thickest of the crowd, he was struck on the head by an upper millstone פֶּלַח רֶכֶב thrown from a woman's hand—the hand, the moment, and the instrument, being all determined by the Disposer of all events. The effect was "all to break his skull," *i.e.* entirely to break, or crush in his skull. [It is an old English expression]. It was the upper part of a hand-mill that was used, that which revolves when grinding, while the under part is fixed (Deut. xxiv. 6; Luke xvii. 35). It was the work of women to use such a mill. Some supposed they expected to be imprisoned several days in the top flat of the tower, and therefore would need to grind corn. It is singular that the great warrior Pyrrhus met his death in a manner precisely similar; a large tile from the roof of a house being thrown upon him by a poor woman, whose son was engaged in combat with the warrior, and in danger of being slain by him.

At length we see the "violent man's dealing come down on his own pate." "The wickedness of the wicked has come to an end." There lies proud Abimelech, and a woman slew him! This was the last arrow he received from a world which he bitterly hated, and by which in turn he was shunned as a demon in human form. It was to him a small thing to die, but for a man of such lofty pretensions, it was bitter gall to have it said, that a woman slew the proud Abimelech!

How in a moment suddenly
To ruin brought are they!
With fearful terrors utterly
They are consumed away.

Even like unto a dream when one
From sleeping doth arise;
So thou, O Lord, when thou awak'st
Their image shalt despise.

54-57. **His young man thrust him through . . . and when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, etc.]** An incubus was taken off the land. Everyone breathed more freely. Not a single tear was shed. No mourner was anywhere seen. The young man is glad of the opportunity offered to put his master to death (unlike the case of Saul, I. Sam. xxxi. 4, 5). The men who composed Abimelech's army will not do another stroke of the bloody work, to which he had called them. The army melted away, and every man went to his own home. We hear nothing of a funeral—nothing of a successor—nothing of a wind-up!—nothing but an ominous pause on earth, and a whisper from Heaven's Justice saying, "Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren; and all the evil of the men of Shechem, did God render upon their heads; and upon them came the curse of Jotham, the son of Jerubbaal."

What was said of Pope Boniface VIII. might also be set up as a suitable epitaph for this bramble king of Shechem. "He entered the world like a fox, reigned like a lion, and died like a dog."—*(Trapp).* O unhappy son of Gideon!—perhaps the child of many prayers, certainly the child of a noble example of parental piety, perhaps the child of many pious counsels, certainly the child of great religious privileges, would that the hand of mercy had placed a protracted sick bed between thee, and the summons to appear before the great Judge, that so an opportunity might have been given for repenting of thy evil deeds, and taking refuge in the "blood which cleanseth from all sin!"

HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS.—Verses 22-57.

The Teachings of a Dark Night in Israel's History.

I. God sometimes sends winnowing seasons both on individuals and on communities.

Ordinarily, He is gentle in His providential dealings with men, and for the most part, even under not a few provocations, there is little of the frown on His face, or of the stern in His voice. He would allure, rather than terrify them into repentance. But when they have long made light of sin, and have turned a deaf ear to gentler warnings, at fit seasons He brings influences around them, which thoroughly sift and try their character. Then it is impossible for a man to refrain altogether undiscovered. His arts of concealment will no longer serve his purpose, his heart is stirred as a pool is by the application of a rod, when, from the surface to the bottom, all that it contains is put into a state of agitation. Circumstances in Providence ferment round a man, and he is shaken and tossed as the leaf in the wind, so that he is obliged to appear exactly as he is. The false is then discovered from the true, and what is false in any character is detected as well as what is genuine.

So it was with the Israelites as a community, at different periods of their history; so it was with Gideon; so with Abimelech, and with the men of Shechem. This is one of those lines of practical instruction, which God keeps up in every history from age to age, whether of individuals, or of communities. To bring out men's characters, and show what they are, when exposed to different fires as tests, is one of the great moral uses of such history as is contained in the word of God.

Winnowing seasons are intended not only to reveal what is chaff, but to clear it away. Such a history as that of Abimelech resembles the raging whirlwind, which, however destructive it may seem, has usually the effect of clearing a stagnant atmosphere. It is God's voice saying solemnly, "Stand in awe and sin not. Woe to the wicked man! for it shall be ill with him." It is another kind of rod, that God takes into His hand to chastise His people, besides the Moabites or Midianites.

II. The importance of choosing a right King.

(1.) It was *important for Israel now.* While Gideon ruled as a "judge" the "peace of the nation flowed as a river, and its righteousness as the waves of the sea." But when Abimelech was chosen to occupy the place of power, the wheels went rapidly backwards, and at last by leaps and bounds rolled downhill. A greater mistake could not have been committed, than to choose a fellow mortal to be their king at all, when the King Eternal Himself so graciously condescended to single out this people from all the people of the earth to reign over them. But when they did commit this sin, and cast a slight on the wonderful love of their God, they were punished by being left to choose the worst man in all Israel to occupy that position. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people."

(2.) *It was so in their after history.* In the days when kings ruled over Israel and Judah, the colour of the history was uniformly given by the character of the king. When a certain king ascended the throne, and we read, that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," we uniformly find that the state of things prospered in the land. But when we read, that "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," all things begin to go against him. The sovereign in those days had it in his power to give a tone to society, which none but a despot can wield now. Society then for the most part followed the example of him who reigned over it. But there was in the case of the chosen people another reason. The King was held to represent the people, so that what he was, and did, the people were reckoned to be and to do. Hence we see in one reign the country going to ruin under Saul, and in the very next rising under David to the very climax of its greatness.

(3.) It is *important for any people.* In England, we see the Queen of the freest and most enterprising people on the face of the globe, after the long test of fifty years' rule, retaining as much of the love and loyalty of her subjects as she did on the day when first they hailed her as sovereign; and this, notwithstanding the fact, that the intellectual forces were never more strongly brought into collision than during her reign. While something certainly is due to the excellent constitution of the realm, by which the sovereign is exempted from the responsibility of guiding the legislation of the nation, not a little also, is due to the wise, benevolent, and virtuous character of the Sovereign herself.

(4.) And there *is a King in Zion*, who has seen not one jubilee only, but all the jubilees that are contained in eighteen centuries, and who will see all that are to come through unending time. The Church of God has an everlasting King, to whom she owes all her vital energy, her survival from a thousand dangers, and her future prosperity, until she become a blessing to all the nations of the earth. Jesus is, under the Gospel, the rightful King of all individual hearts, and they are wise indeed who allow Him to reign alike over their thoughts, words, and deeds. Where He is allowed to reign, there order, Heaven's first law, is set up, peace with God is established, peace of conscience is enjoyed, and the joy of the Holy Ghost is the happy atmosphere breathed by the soul. Every man's heart is the chosen seat of Government for this King, and from that centre, He desires to rule the whole life.

III. God's delay in punishing high-handed sin.

Why should three years be allowed to pass, ere such outrageous conduct received the punishment it deserved? The principle of instant retribution for offences committed against the laws of righteousness, under the government of a holy and righteous God, certainly seems the most natural. We see it in the

remark which Shimei's conduct called forth from Abishai to David, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." Such is the instinct of many. And the first threatening uttered by the Lawgiver against the first sin, required instant execution of the penalty on the head of the offender. "In the day thou eatest, thou shalt surely die." That moment the sense of moral turpitude was felt for the first time, separation took place between man and his God, and his body became mortal. But here, as on so many occasions, judgment is deferred. The sun does not cease to shine, nor do Heaven's lightnings flash out against the perpetrator of so many awful murders, but, for three long years, he is permitted to walk the earth, while Heaven's thunders sleep, and he is not consumed.

Two important principles are illustrated by this delay—

1. Without such delay moral government could not be carried on. Moral government requires that there be the fullest liberty for the exercise of the will allowed to the subject of moral rule. Were the transgressor always to be cut down at the moment of transgression, there could be no further opportunity for moral dealing with him. And as the whole race of men have within them a tendency to depart from God, and offend against the laws of His government, in one short hour their history would, on this principle, come to an end. For the tendency to violate the laws of God would certainly show itself, and on every occasion it did death must happen, so that in one day the world would be swept clear of its inhabitants. Besides, were man always to be punished with death for his first sin, there would be no opportunity of bringing out his character on all its sides, and under every variety of circumstance. Farther, if a man saw that for the first known sin he might commit the certain consequence would be death, he would be put under a system of terrorism as to his obedience, which would destroy all liberty of action, and it would not be known what his character really was, until he were left free to act according to his own disposition.

2. This delay shows God's unwillingness that men should perish. If it were a pleasure to Him to inflict death on the wicked, we might suppose He would make haste, on the commission of sin, always to carry out the sentence. Had even His love for men been according to an ordinary standard, and measurable by a man's conception, we might suppose, that the heinous character of several sins would be such, as to provoke the offended Lawgiver to send swift and condign punishment on the heads of the transgressors, in order to mark His detestation of their sins. But God is so unwilling that men should perish, that He always acts as one reluctant to punish. He delays and defers, and defers and delays, until men begin to think He has forgotten their sins entirely. Though opposed to sin more than light is to darkness, His patience goes far beyond the measure of a man's forbearance. He never loses the absolute calm of His holy nature. The want of self-government is far beneath the majesty of His august character. "I am God—not man,—therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." That he rises up so slowly to do the work of the Just Judge, proves His reluctance to proceed against the rebel, even when the argument on the side of justice is most strong. It shows that His heart is at the farthest possible remove from taking delight in the death of the sinner, and that no possible motive could induce Him to inflict the penal sentence, except that, on the one hand, justice requires that He should administer to sin what is its due, and on the other, He jealously requires that there should be a full vindication of His own holy and righteous character as the moral Governor of the universe.

IV. God remembers all the sins that wicked men commit.

Though full three years passed since the great crimes were committed, which opened the way for Abimelech's ascending the throne of at least a part of Israel, nothing had been forgotten by the all-seeing God. Every moment of that time these sins were present to His view, yet He did not depart from the customary method to act with deliberation, in bringing round the time and the manner of the punishment.

Men forget that "with the Lord a thousand years are as one day." The sins of a man's whole lifetime are as present to "that faithful witness," at the last hour of life, as they were at any previous part of it. Sins which he has left fifty years behind him in the past, are as freshly in the presence of Him with whom he has to do, as they were each one at the moment of commission. God says of His backsliding people, "They consider not, that I remember all their wickedness." This is an element which the wicked too often leave out of consideration. For there is ever a proneness in men to make light of sin, because it is not visibly and solemnly dealt with the moment it is committed. So far however is God from not marking it, that He says even of His own people, "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond" (Jer. xvii. 1). It is impossible that sin can ever fall into oblivion, until satisfaction is given for it. No man is safe from the sins he committed many years ago, on the ground that possibly they may now be forgotten. Not a single sin can be forgotten, until it is solemnly dealt with, and due atonement made.

For the final account, God will bring every secret work and thought into judgment. And to represent the accuracy and particularity with which the process shall be gone through, we are told there are "Books of remembrance" which shall be opened, and every man shall be dealt with according to what is found written in the Books. It will then be seen, that "God requireth that which is past." Not only the acts of the life, but the springs of character in the thoughts, volitions and purposes of the inner man—all the lines of a man's conduct, beginning with his motives and aims, his judgments and decisions, and going out to the spirit which he displayed, the principles on which he acted, and the whole course of life which he led. It is clear, therefore, that no sinful man can build any hope of deliverance from condemnation on the ground, that any of his past sins may become forgotten through lapse of time. Unless some abnormally great and solemn transaction should take place before the end of life, he will to a certainty find all the sins of his life then meeting him, in the same measure of guilt they had when they were committed (Eccl. xii. 14; Ps. l. 21; Rom. ii., 16; Ps. xc. 8).

What a relief from anxiety does the Gospel message bring at this point. For 1500 years the atoning victim was laid on the altar year by year, showing that there was still a remembrance of sins. At last came "the *Lamb of God* which *bore away* the sin of the world." "Christ died for our sins." "Now there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." He hath "finished transgression, and made an end of sin." "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." So great is the change wrought in the condition of those who accept of this solemn method of disposing of their sins, that we read in one place, "In those days, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found again." "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." And yet again, "They are without fault before the throne of God."

V. The miseries which befall the wicked come not by chance, but as the result of God's moral government of the world.

It was not by mere accident, without any directing cause, that a spirit of disaffection rose between the Shechemites and their self-appointed king. It was indeed a natural expectation, when we take the dispositions and proclivities of the parties into account. It was natural that the rule of a man so imperious in will, so selfish in aims, so capricious in tastes, so unprincipled in character, with no relaxation in his rod-of-iron treatment, and nothing benignant, or even tolerant in his bearing, would very soon cool down loyalty in any hearts where it really existed, and, in spite of themselves, the men of Shechem would waken sooner or later to the conviction, that they had been made dupes of by a bold and aspiring man, whom they could neither love nor respect. They saw that he was making use of them as tools, or stepping-ladders, to something higher. For, not content with remaining at home in Shechem, he seems to have been making occasional excursions to other places; and Thebez is mentioned as one of the towns which he had brought under his authority. Hence, among those who elected him king, there would be coldness first, then alienation, and by-and-bye hatred and resentment, with, at last, a desire for revenge. All this was according to the working of natural causes.

But this Book sees God's hand in everything. So we read that "God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem." It is added that there was a special design in view, "that the cruelty done to the sons of Jerubbaal," &c. This testimony implies, that there was something more than the blind working of natural causes. Overruling these and directing these, was the will of the Supreme Ruler in Providence at work, to fulfil a purpose of retribution on the heads of perpetrators of a great wickedness. We dare not deny to God the character of a Moral Governor, nor His presence in His own works. We cannot resolve the whole course of causes and consequences in the history of this world into a mere system of *naturalism*, nor can we accept of *deism* as the true philosophy of God's relation to man, and at the same time be guided by the teachings of this Book. Scripture uniformly recognises God's presence among the affairs of men, adjusting the laws so as to reward the righteous, and inflict retribution on the wicked. God could have brought a hundred different issues out of the train of causes that were at work in this history, had it so pleased him. But he arranged to bring about that which did actually happen, that the object might be gained which He intended, in the righteous punishment of evildoers.

VI. Compacts formed in sin are soon broken.

The Shechemites appear to have sworn to Abimelech to be faithful to him as their king, while he on his part engaged to act similarly by them. But, at the time they did so, their hands were reeking with the innocent blood they had shed, and so the compact was formed in sin.

(1.) *The curse of the Lord rested on such compact.* High-handed sin always brings down the frown of Him who sits on the Throne of Righteousness. When men "walk contrary to Him, He walks contrary to them;" and though they "associate themselves together they shall be broken in pieces; though they take counsel together, it shall come to nought." "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil." "He maketh the devices of the people of none effect." "He is angry with the wicked every day."

(2.) *There is no principle in such compact which conscience can respect.* None of these wicked men could respect either themselves, or each other, for the revolting act of wickedness of which they were guilty, in having slain the seventy innocent sons of Jerubbaal. On the contrary, conscience, as the "domestic chaplain" of the soul [*Trapp*], in so far as he was allowed to utter his voice, must have loudly condemned the iniquity, and this must have led to mutual recrimination against one another. It must indeed have produced the constant risk of an explosion, conscience acting as a sort of dynamitard in the camp. Or, if conscience were seared and practically inoperative among them, then there was no principle of *right* to hold them to their compact; conscience being the faculty which acknowledges the existence of what is right and what is wrong. But when the sense of doing what is right is taken away, where is the security for continuing faithful to the compact?

(3.) *Among wicked associations there is no real cohesive power.* The parties here concerned, both the man who aspired to be king and those who agreed to elect him to that high office, knew that this was an open act of rebellion against that God who was already King of Israel, and who wished none other to usurp the seat. And there was the terrible aggravation of this sin, in the previous massacre. What then could have led them to associate together to gain such an end? It could not possibly have been any desire thereby to promote the good of the commonwealth. It could only have been some selfish and interested purposes of their own which they believed would thereby be served. Abimelech was a man of unbounded ambition, and seemed to have no thoughts but those of self-aggrandisement. The men of Shechem were nothing to him but tools to serve his purpose. They, on the other hand, thought they saw in Abimelech one who might form a suitable rallying point for the scattered tribes of Israel, and one who, by uniting all the people, and going out before them to fight their battles, might make them become respected all around, as one of the great nations of the earth—Shechem being the capital city. It was an additional consideration to this, that he had destroyed the house of Jerrubbaal, who was the destroyer of their god. And still further they said of Abimelech, "Is he not our brother—of our own stock, and a young man of excellent promise?"

In all this banding, together there was no real cohesive power. The motives of the respective parties were not only not the same, but were strongly in conflict; and each party had but to come to see in actual history what the aims of the other were, in order to become at once jealous, and suspicious of deceit being practised by their partners in the compact. What cared Abimelech for the feelings and interests of the men of Shechem, if only his iron will were fully carried out among them. Was not he their master, and was not their whole purpose in life summed up simply in obeying the king? Let any one tremble if he should dare to think otherwise. Such was the spirit of the ruler. Those who had chosen him to the office felt that they were as birds caught in a snare. Their eyes were opened to the fact, that, in place of being exalted in station, and realising a new golden age of their history as a people, they had come under a reign of terror, and had sunk to the position of slaves, to be trodden under foot and made to do all kinds of drudgery at the will of a capricious despot. Here, surely, was nothing that was attractive, but everything that was repellent.

So is it universally among the wicked—*there is no proper cohesive power.* We cannot accept the line of the poet as correct—

> "Devil with devil damn'd firm concord holds."

The only point in which the wicked entirely agree is, their common hatred of what is good. Pilate and Herod for once agreed, when they both had occasion

to oppose the Saviour. The nations around Israel were as a rule ever quarrelling with each other, until some one of them began to oppose Israel, when quickly the others joined with them (Ps. lxxxiii.). The wicked are in their very nature selfish, proud, jealous, full of envy, covetousness, malice, and evil lusts and passions, which could not fail to break up and disintegrate their unions more or less.

(4.) *Where there is no strongly uniting force, men's fickleness tends to break up compacts.* Nothing is more capricious than the human will, when left entirely without the restraint of right principle. All history proves it. We see it in the treatment given by the populace of the Grecian States to their heroes in the field, or their wise men of the senate or the schools, who were half worshipped by them to-day; yet to-morrow, for some freak of the popular will, were either banished their country, or had a deep brand of odium affixed to their names. It is not without reason that our essayist has said—"The head that to-day grows giddy with the roar of the million has the very next been fixed on a pole." Nearly all Oriental history proves it; portions of Roman history, portions of the history of nearly all the other countries of Europe, and especially France, exemplify it; nor do we except certain periods of our own English history.

VII. Our idols often prove our scourges.

The men of Shechem were at first hero-worshippers of Abimelech, in which they grievously sinned, when they made him king in place of Jehovah. Now Abimelech becomes their scourge in the terrible tragedy here recorded (Jer. ii. 19; Prov. i. 31). Thus David found it with Absalom and Adonijah; Jacob, for many years with Joseph; Jehoshaphat with Ahab; and the Israelites, with several heathen nations with whom they intermarried and had too friendly relations.

VIII. Men are often called to read their sin in their punishment.

(1.) Abimelech rose to influence by putting forth false claims as an adventurer, and now it is by the setting forth of the false claims of another adventurer (Gaal), that the standard of revolt is raised against his authority.

(2.) In the house where he found the money, that enabled him to carry into execution the awful deed which left his way free to ascend the throne, his subjects met to pour curses on his head, and to plot his ruin.

(3) The man who made it his boast to say, "My father was a king," is at last rejected by his votaries for one who was the son of a slave (Ebed means a slave).

(4.) By a woman he rose to power (his mother; when the Shechemites said "He is our brother") and by a woman he met his death.

(5.) He slew all his brothers on one stone, and now by means of one stone he is slain.

(6.) He sinned so much, that he might get the crown set on his head, and now he dies through his head being crushed.

(7.) His grand ambition was, that his name might go down to posterity as Abimelech the Invincible," and yet the last thing the world hears of him is, A woman slew him."

IX. All the wicked's confidences are refuges of lies.

The men of Shechem who swore to be faithful to the upstart king, soon rebelled against him in a body, and followed another adventurer—Zebul the

ruler of the city, was the only friend that stuck to his master, and he appears to have acted from selfish motives. The men of the tower were against him. The people of Thebez to a man rose against him. And the very men who followed him did so through fear; for, the moment he breathed his last, every man threw down his sword and retired to his home; while the body of their chief was left to the vultures, and his name to the execration of posterity. (Ps. xxxvii. 35; Jon. ii.)

How different the confidence of the righteous! (Isa. lvii. 2; xxvi. 3, 4; Ps. cxii. 7; cxxv. 1; Isa. xxxiii. 15, 16).

X. The wicked are often employed to be the instruments of inflicting the punishment of their sins on each other.

Thus it was conspicuously here, in the case of the men of Shechem and their so-called king. Thus it has been in nearly all ages, in the wars which one nation has had with another. How often, too, in Scripture history do we read of the king of Babylon at one time, of Nineveh at another, or of Egypt at still another being employed by the Governor among the nations, to punish this or that people for their long-continued wickedness in the sight of high Heaven! The wars of the Saracens and Crusaders, the descent of the Turkish hordes from the heights of Central Asia, on the west of Asia, and the east of Europe, and the wars of ancient Rome, when the Cæsars conquered all the west, the north, and the east of Europe, and the wars, too, which led to the fall of the Roman empire by the inrushing of Goths, Huns, and Vandals from all parts of the north, for the destruction of the city that had so long sinned, are examples.

It is on the same principle, that the evil angels are said to be the instruments of inflicting wrath on the wicked. They brought the plagues on Egypt (Ps. lxxviii. 49); perhaps they brought the flood on the old world; some suppose they brought the hail, the lightning, and the hornet on the Canaanites for their destruction; also they destroyed the property of the Gadarenes by entering into the swine; Satan himself is said to have the power of inflicting death on mankind as God's messenger (Heb. ii. 14)—he is the "spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. ii. 2), and these are "led captive by him at his will" (2 Tim. ii. 26).

CHAPTER X.

FORTY-FIVE YEARS PASSED OVER IN SILENCE.

(Vers. 1-5.)

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. **After Abimelech.**] This man is recognised as having been a ruler in Israel, notwithstanding his scandalous career. Probably he was permitted to occupy this position for a time, as a new method of chastising the people for their extreme tendency to choose another king than Jehovah, and to show that "their sorrows should be multiplied that hasten after another god." The rigorous rule of the bramble-bush sovereign was as severe an affliction, as the inrushing of a marauding foe from without. By this course, too, means were furnished for exhibiting the desperate wickedness of the human heart; and the case is held up as a beacon to warn the men of every age.

To defend Israel.] Not against any actual assault of an enemy, but he stood forth as the guardian of the public safety, ready, when necessary, to ward off all danger, and, by his very presence, to prevent any disturbance of the national peace from within or from without. He would administer justice wisely, and provide against the likely or possible incursions of surrounding foes.

Tola, the son of Puah, the son of Dodo.] *Puah* is also written *Pua* and *Phuvah*. This time the tribe of Issachar is chosen to provide a judge. In David's time, they were men of renown, "that had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do" (I. Chron. xii. 32). God chose the "saviours" from different tribes, to show His readiness to honour all the tribes in turn. This was a proof also that the organic unity of Israel was still preserved. Dodo—is here a proper name, and is not to be taken as meaning "uncle," (Sept.) (II. Sam. xxiii. 9).

Dwelt in Shamir.] When he entered on the duties of his office, he found it more convenient to live nearer the centre of the country, and accordingly he went to Mount Ephraim.

2. Judged Israel.] The northern and eastern tribes. **Twenty-three years and died.]** Not a single particular of his public life is recorded. But it was not therefore unimportant. To secure peace was no small blessing. To be a check on the outbreakings of idolatry was for the covenanted people an immense benefit. Though no fame was acquired, "the Lord had need of him" for a time. He has need of the purling brook as well as the majestic stream. In man's judgment the one may seem insignificant compared with the other, but in God's estimation everything is beautiful in its place. The family line of Tola, however, appear to have been distinguished in Israel all along, beginning with the ancestor (Gen. xlvi. 13; Num. xxvi. 23), and going on to the days of David (I. Chron. vii. 1-5), including the judge mentioned in this chapter.

3. Jair the Gileadite,] born in Gilead, the half of which was given to the half-tribe of Manasseh (Deut. iii. 13). This name has occasioned much discussion. It must be remembered that family names were a feature in Israelitish history—the same name frequently coming in, in the same line of descent, through different generations. *Jair* was the name of the ancestral head of one of the most influential family lines in Manasseh. He was one, apparently the chief, of the "children of Machir," who, in the days of the dividing of the land, "dispossessed the Amorite that was in Gilead," and first "took some of the small towns, calling them *Havoth-jair*" (the abodes of Jair), and afterwards accomplished the most important feat of taking "the 60 great cities with walls and brazen bars that were in the region of Argob, a part of Bashan." This was the land of the giants; and such a victory could only have been gained through *faith*. To perpetuate it he called these 60 walled towns of the giants by the name of *Bashan-havoth-jair*—meaning the abodes, or towns, which Jair conquered for himself in the giant country. Hence, honour is done to this ancestor of the line by referring to him frequently (Num. xxxii. 39-41; Deut. iii. 13, 14; Josh. xiii. 30; I. Kings iv. 13), and especially as the possessor of these Bashan cities by conquest.

Reference is made also to Jair in I. Chron. ii. 22, who cannot be the same with the first Jair, for "the towns of Jair" are spoken of as existing before his time (ver. 23), *i.e.*, the towns of the first, or ancestral Jair. Some suppose the allusion is to Jair, the judge. It may have been so, notwithstanding the statement that this Jair's grandmother is said to have been the "daughter of Machir" (ver. 21, 22), and as hundreds of years elapsed between the days of Machir and the time of Jair the judge, there must have been several generations during the interval. Yet that difficulty could be solved by understanding the word "daughter" to mean descendant of Machir, which is so often done in the accounts given of family lines among the Israelites. But where the accounts given are so meagre, it is impossible to decide definitely whether the Jair in I. Chron. ii. 22 was the same with Jair, the judge here, or was another person of the same name. If he was the same, then he had at first 23 cities, and must have increased them to 30, that every one of his sons might have a city; or, as some think, he got possession of the 60 cities which the first Jair took out of the hands of the Amorite (I. Chron. ii. 23). It is, however, probable that there were more than even two persons, heads of families, called by this name, for on account of its fame many would be desirous to hand it down.

Judged Israel twenty-two years.] From this long period of peaceable government, we may suppose, he was a very capable administrator of justice, as well as a man of high character for piety like his great ancestors.

4. That rode on thirty ass colts.] Horses were not then in the country. To ride on an ass was at that time equivalent to a man keeping his carriage now. It was a mark of wealth, which few could afford, for nearly the whole population were accustomed to go from place to place on foot. This must, therefore, have been a large and opulent family. The ass was then a superior type of animal to what it is and long has been in these more recent times. This was especially true of the "white ass" (ch. v. 10, also ch. xii. 14; I. Kings i. 33; x. 28). The horse when it appeared was generally associated with war, while the ass being quiet and the reverse of formidable, was regarded as the symbol of peace. Hence Zion's King came riding on an ass, His kingdom being one of peace (Zech. ix. 9).

Thirty cities which are called Havoth-jair unto this day.] Probably the same towns as those in Num. xxxii. 41, when the name Havoth-jair was first used; also in I. Kings iv. 13 (second clause). They are here called "cities," though in reality only villages. "Villages are cities to a contented mind" (*Henry*).

5. Was buried in Camon.] Probably on the west side of Jordan. It deserves to be noticed, that of all whom God called to serve Him in the office of judge or king, care is taken to say what became of their dust.

A Fresh Course of Sin and Penitence.

6. Did evil again in the sight of the Lord.] (See on ch. ii. 12-19; iii. 7, 8, 12; iv. 1-3; vi. 1, 2, &c.). They continue to do evil, as if there were no curing of this plague of the heart, in departing from the living and true God.

The gods of Syria (Aram), of Zidon, of Moab, &c.] Notwithstanding all the expostulation used, the warnings given, and the severe applications of the rod, they still persisted in apostasy, nay, more, they are worse than ever; for now they go in for idolatry wholesale. Well might the prophet call on heaven and earth to listen to the tale of such dreadful impiety (Isa. i. 2-7; Jer. chs. i.-x.; Hosea-*passim*. The heathen being left only with the dim light of nature, could never rise to the vast conception of supposing universal power, infinite wisdom, and perfect goodness, to be concentrated in one God. Hence they supposed it laid a broader and safer basis, to have many gods, as implying greater resources. Even Cicero, though he set forth in his book, *De Natura Deorum*, the vanity of the heathen deities, yet declared in one of his orations, that it "did not become the majesty of the Roman empire to worship one god only." But on this point, Israel had the most precise teaching, and therefore sinned against the clearest light.

The gods of Syria, or Aram, are not named, but one of them was Rimmon (2 Kings v. 18), They were worshipped by Ahaz, as the gods of Damascus (2 Chron. xxviii. 23; 2 Kings xvi. 10), Those of the Zidonians, or Phenicians, were Baal and Ashteroth; of the Moabites, Chemosh; of the children of Ammon, Moloch, or Milcom; and of the Philistines, Dagon. These probably had all substantially the same features of character, just as all wicked men have a family likeness, yet there might be many varieties owing to local and accidental associations. The great fact always coming out was, that the worship of Jehovah was set aside (1 Kings xi. 6-8). This amounted to the plucking up of religion by the roots, had it been allowed to continue.

7. The anger of the Lord was kindled.] After the modes of speech used among men, the strong Divine opposition to such high-handed sin is here intimated; but we are not to suppose there was any ungovernable emotion in the Divine mind, such as we always associate with anger in human bosoms. **Sold them into the hands of, &c.]** comp. Deut. xxxii. 30 (see on iii. 8; iv. 2). The idolatry seems to have been on all sides, and so one enemy is raised up on the east, and another on the west. The Ammonites oppressed those on the east side of Jordan principally, and the Philistines, the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin, being nearest to them. This oppression by the Philistines is that which is referred to in the days of Samson, but is supposed to have been coeval with that of the eastern tribes by the children of Ammon, so long as that continued. The calamity which befel the trans-Jordanic tribes is first described

8. That year they vexed and oppressed for eighteen years, &c.] We take it to be the year when God first gave them up helplessly into the hands of the enemy. *That* year on for 18 years. The enemy hated that people above all others, and as soon as they got the opportunity they were not slow to improve it. They oppressed with a will, and that for as many years as they had permission. Well might David say, "Let me not fall into the hands of man." The verbs רָעַץ and רָצַץ have much the same meaning, and express rough and violent treatment, nearly equivalent to Ps. ii. 9 (last clause). They were crushed, or dashed to pieces. The use of the two words is to give emphasis to the statement (comp. ch. iv. 3; vi. 1-6.

9. Passed over Jordan to fight against Judah, &c.] Probably they had laid bare all the country on the east side, and now they wished to ravage the lands on the west side. This appears to have been when many years of the oppression had gone, and before as yet the weight of the Philistine power had been much felt.

10. Cried unto the Lord, &c.] Comp. ch. ii. 9-15; iv. 3; vi. 6. This was no doubt a cry of distress, which is little more than an instinct of nature, but it also contains some acknowledgement of their sins, as the cause of their misery, and so is better than the mere howling of an animal when it is stricken (Hos. vii. 14). The connecting particles כִּי *in that*, is a specific putting of the finger on the cause of all their distress. **We have sinned, inasmuch as we have forsaken God and served Balaam.**

11. **Did not I deliver you?**] This is supplemented, but most justly so. From the Egyptians Ex. i.–xiv.); from the Amorites (Num. xxi., 21–35); from the children of Ammon (ch. iii. 12, 13, etc.); from the Philistines (ch. iii. 31, through Shamgar). [In 1 Sam. xii. 9, the Philistines come between Moab and Sisera, but we are not to take that as meaning the historical connection].

12. **The Zidonians also** (the general name for the league of nations to the north of Canaan whose forces were commanded by Sisera); **the Amalekites** (the reference here is chiefly to ch. iii. 13 and vi. 3. When any attack was to be made on Israel, Amalek was always ready); and **the Maonites** (the Midianites, or probably that section of the Midianites that were next to Israel, and planned the invasion of ch. vi., but were joined by the great mass of the confederated people) see 2 Chron. xxvi. 7.

13. **Yet ye have forsaken me, etc.**] All this is said to produce deeper conviction of sin. For the really serious thing is to have thorough work in dealing with the sin. That well done, it is quick and easy work to bring round the deliverance. "God keeps count of His deliverances; much more ought we to do so"—(*Trapp*), comp. Deut. xxxii 5, 6; Ezra ix. 13, 14. The great deliverances which God here calls to mind are seven in number, corresponding with the number of the different national idols which they had served, every one of which had brought them low, almost to the point of destruction. A most valuable double instruction was conveyed by these sevens. A seven times trial (complete) was made of their hearts, and they were found capable of casting off their God in order to serve any idol, no matter what, all round the compass! An equally full trial was made of the character of their God, and He was found incapable of casting them off and breaking His covenant, notwithstanding their repeated and highly aggravated sins!

I will deliver you no more.] Speaking after the manner of men, this was the treatment they deserved. They could not reasonably expect anything else. It is the language of upbraiding, and partly of threatening. But even in Israel's worst days the assurance is held out, that where there is true penitence, there will be pardon (Jer. xxvi. 3, 13; xxxi. 18–20; Rev. ii. 5). For "God often threatens that He may not punish. He pardons such sin too, as no man could do (see Jer. iii. 1)"—(*Trapp*). The whole of this remonstrance is parallel to the case of Hos. v. 15; vi. 1–3, where God chastises His people by hiding His face from them which soon brings them into deep waters, so that they are glad to return to Him; comp. also Isa. lvii. 17, 18.

15. **Do to us what seemeth good unto Thee.**] They leave themselves, confessedly guilty, in God's hands. They are ready "to accept the punishment of their iniquity" (Lev. xxvi. 41, 43). They practically say "we will bear the indignation of the Lord, for we have sinned against Him" (Micah vii. 9). This was the very best thing they could do—to confess at once they were all in the wrong and deserved chastisement, but leaving themselves entirely at God's disposal. No sinner can take a safer course than, while confessing his sins with sorrow, to leave himself to the promptings of God's heart. That heart never fails, if only the obstruction is removed to the outflow of the Divine loving kindness (Jer. xxxi. 18, 19 with ver. 20). Their confessions are followed up by deeds. "They put away the strange gods," and so the sincerity of their penitence is crowned (Prov. xxviii. 13; Hos. xiv. 8; 1 Sam. vii. 2, 3; Gen. xxxv. 1–5; Job. xxxiv. 31, 32).

His soul was (vexed) grieved for the misery of Israel.] קָצַר *was shortened or impatient* (Num. xxi. 4), like one who is restless or uneasy, and so is moved to take action. "My bowels are troubled for him" (Hos. xi. 8, 9; Isa. xl. 2).

17. **Gathered together.**] Assembled by public proclamation (ch. iv. 13; vii. 23). The purpose is stated in next chapter. **Encamped in Gilead.**] Here it refers to the whole territory possessed by Israel on the east side of Jordan, but sometimes it refers only to that part which was occupied by the half tribe of Manasseh. **The children of Israel assembled.**] No longer deserted by their God, they are animated with fresh courage (Ps. lx. 11, 12; cxviii. 8–12; xviii. 29–34). **In Mizpeh.**] Mizpeh (masc.) is said to be the *town*; Mizpah (fem.), the *district* (Josh. xi. 3, 8), Other references are made to it as Ramoth-mizpeh, or simply Ramoth in Gilead (Josh. xiii. 26; xx. 8; I. Chron. vi. 80, see also I. Kings iv. 13; xxii. 3, 6. It was a convenient centre for rendezvous, and a place of great natural strength. With the article it means *the watch-tower*, or heap of witness (Gen. xxxi. 48, 49).

18. **And the people and princes, etc.**] Rather, *and the people, even the princes of Gilead*, i.e., the heads of tribes and families on the east side of Jordan. The name *captain* is used in ch. xi. 6, 11, where it means *the chief leader*.

HOMILETIC REMARKS.—Verses 1-18.

QUIET TIMES.

1. These come undeserved. On the principle, that there is "no peace to the wicked," we might expect, in the ordinary exercise of justice, that troubles would never cease in a community where sin was daily committed. The existence of sin is always a cause of war with God, and, as it is manifest, that in every generation of Israel, the great majority of the people were idolaters in heart, the natural expectation was, that there would be no modifying of the severity of the Divine dealings with them at any period of their history. Yet, in fact, mild and pacific dealings did come in frequently, and so must be set down as the undeserved loving kindness of the Ruler of Providence.

How erroneous are the data, on which men form their judgments of God's ways of dealing with them. They forget that they are ever provoking God to anger, by living every day for their own pleasure, and refusing to acknowledge His claims on their obedience, or even recognising His presence in their midst. They habitually banish him from their very thoughts, and yet murmur if He should send them trouble in any degree. They take for granted that immunity from trouble is their due; whereas "it is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed." Were justice alone the rule of dealing, we could look for no respite. Quiet times, when they come, are entirely undeserved (Ezra ix. 13, 15).

2. They come only after a vindication of the Divine Righteousness. In the frightful tragedy which came like a sweeping torrent on the great transgressors at Shechem, when a hurried and awful death overtook Abimelech and the inhabitants of Shechem, not a single man excepted, the whole nation were aroused from their slumbers to read the lesson of God's anger against the idolaters. Every man seemed to hear the voice for himself, "Stand in awe and sin not." It was God vindicating His own character as the righteous Moral Governor of the world. This being done in the sight of all Israel, it was fit that a pause should take place in the further sending of troubles on the land.

3. Quiet times fill the large spaces of human history. Even in this Book of Judges, which many think describes a tempestuous period of Israelitish history, the calamitous times are the exception, while those of peace and quiet are the rule. Israel's first oppression was for eight years. This was followed by a rest of 40 years, or five times as long. The next period of distress lasted 18 years, and then the land had respite for 80 years. Then came trouble for 20 years, and rest for 40 years. Again we read of seven years' oppression, and this followed by 40 years of quiet. Once more, we have the cataract of bloodshed and sin for three years, and now a pause, and dead stillness for 45 years.

So it is in human life generally, notwithstanding men's high-handed provocations. Times of immunity from trial form by far the larger portions of our life. Our days of good health greatly outnumber the days of sickness. Our times of peace and comfort, are greatly longer than the periods of severe pain and great calamity. Our seasons of sunshine also are long, compared with those when our sky is overcast. Our hopes, as a rule, by many degrees exceed our fears. Cases also are numerous where, if we be true Christians, when our troubles abound, our consolations do much more abound. Generally, the expression of friendly feeling greets our ears more frequently than those of anger and disaffection. All things go to show that the largest spaces in human life partake of the character of quiet and goodwill, notwithstanding the provocations we give to the Ruler of Providence.

4. Quiet times are greatly needed.

(1). *To preserve the benign attitude of God in dealing with guilty men.*

To keep up this attitude is essential, for without this view of the Divine character, men would never be brought back to God. "We love Him because He loves us." A free and full revelation of the loving nature of God, is necessary to remove the prejudice which is natural to the human heart against God, that He is hard and inexorable, ever disposed to say, "Pay me that thou owest to the uttermost farthing." Happy is the man who gets entirely free of that prejudice.

By often sending seasons of quiet when He might justly appoint times of great distress, God shows that he will not be always frowning, as if, like weak man, He could not remain self-controlled in the face of so many provocations. But as He must show Himself jealous for His own great name, there are junctures when he comes forth to vindicate His honour. He reserves special occasions, called emphatically "the day of the Lord," when "He lays judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plumbline," and so vindicates His own Majesty on the one hand, while He visits sin as it deserves on the other. On these special occasions, He shows what he might do at any time, though for the most part he forbears. Thus the times of forbearance, or of quiet, are many compared with the times of smiting: "His tender mercies are over all His works."

"He will not chide continually,
Nor keep His anger still;
With us He dealt not as we sinned,
Nor did requite our ill."

(2.) *To allow time to recover from the effects of great agitation.* After the violent spasm to which the country was subjected by Abimelech, it required a period of calm to recover from the shock and the confusion. Each oppression of the land through the in-rush of Vandalic hordes produced a disastrous effect. The country was desolated, the homes of Israel were broken up, the bonds of society were loosed, the administration of justice ceased, and the whole nation was "scattered and peeled" (ch. v. 6, 8.) Quiet times were needed to set the nation on its feet again, to give heart to its people, and bring back days of prosperity and of hope. The operations of industry must be resumed, fields must be sown and reaped, the useful arts of life must be prosecuted, channels for trade must be opened up, and laws for the security of life and property must be established. God never wished to "make a full end" of His chosen people, and, though they were often brought very low for their sins, and made to feel how easy it would have been to dash them to the ground beyond all possibility of rising again, He ever remembered that they were the people on whom He had set His love, out of whom should arise the promised "seed" that was one day to bless the whole earth, and so they were restored.

(3) *To carry on all the useful activities of life.* If a nation is to live, there must be scope for its activity. Freedom of action must be allowed to the mass of its people to carry out their schemes and fulfil their duties. And it is in the unfettered, healthful working out of the innumerable small schemes and duties of life that the temporal wellbeing of a nation mainly consists. The great deeds of its heroes are things to dazzle the eye, and perhaps enkindle hope, inspire courage, and excite to lofty aspiration. But it is far less on these, that the true prosperity of a people depends, than on the industry and energy of the myriads of hands that are ever plying the loom in the common machinery of human life.

"Niagara excites our wonder, and we stand amazed at the power and greatness of God as He 'pours it from the hollow of His hand.' But one Niagara in

enough for a continent and a world, while that same world needs tens of thousands of silver fountains and gently flowing rivulets, that shall water every farm, every meadow, and every garden, and shall flow on every day and night with their gentle and quiet beauty. So with the acts of our lives. It is not by great deeds only, like those of Howard, nor by great sufferings only, like those of the martyrs, that good is to be done. It is by the quiet and useful virtues of the Christian character, the meek forbearance of the Christian temper, the spirit of forgiveness in the husband, the wife, the father, the mother, the brother, the sister, the friend, and the neighbour in every avenue in which men move, that society is to be improved and its bonds strengthened."—[*Barnes.*]

(4) *For purposes of consideration and profitable meditation.* Calm thought is always needed to weigh things in even scales. Amid the hurry and excitement of strong passing events the mind cannot estimate the strength of the forces at work around it, and is disturbed in its judgments, like the trembling of the needle in a rolling ship. Quiet hours are needed to consider the "why" and the "wherefore" of God's dealings. Proper meditation on what has happened is apt to lead to self-humiliation and amendment of ways. It prompts men to say, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn to the Lord." The broken and contrite spirit is cherished (Lam. iii. 28–36), arguments are weighed, motives and aims are examined, and new resolutions in the strength of God's grace are formed. Deeper attention is paid to the roots of character, new seeds of profitable thought are deposited in the mind, and a more careful, more mature, and better-weighed decision is come to, not to continue the war any longer with God, but to yield up everything at the expression of His will.

The Silences of History.

Here are two judges mentioned by name, as having occupied the posts of most public observation in the whole nation, and in charge of its public welfare for the long period of close on half a century, and yet not a single deed is noticed that either of them did. Their family circle is referred to, and their high social position, but as regards the share they took in the public events of their time there is a perfect blank in the narrative. On this we remark—

1. **The silences of Scripture history are sometimes speaking silences.** It is so in the case of Melchizedeck. All that is told of him in the narrative is comprised in one short paragraph. We are only told what he did in blessing Abraham, when he returned from the slaughter of the kings; but not a word is said about his father and mother on the one hand, nor about his death on the other. Yet see how much the apostle made of this silence in Heb. vii. 3; also David in Ps. cx. There is silence kept, too, in regard to the Rock in the wilderness as to its being a foreshadowing of Christ in being a Smitten Rock, and water issuing from it sufficient to preserve the life of God's people to the end of their wilderness journey, with other particulars. But we should hardly have ventured to say that that Rock was Christ had not the inspired writer told us so (1 Cor. x. 4). It is the same with many other objects in Old Testament history. And the absence of any statement that any one of them was a type of Christ has the significance of saying, that the whole framework of that history was made up in such a way as to foreshadow Christ.

Here there is a speaking silence, when two men follow each other as chief magistrates of the nation, at a most difficult juncture of affairs, when public morality was low, when the public administration of justice was all but paralysed, when the tide of ungodliness swept over the land, and nothing was so likely to happen as a series of the most tragic occurrences, and yet there is

nothing to say! This fact speaks volumes for the practical wisdom, the tact and prudence, and the comprehensive "understanding of the times on the part of these men to know what Israel ought to do." An uneventful age means a period of peace and contentment. Hence the adage, "Happy is the nation that hath no history."

2. These silences are numerous. Over the history of the whole world before the Flood the veil of silence is spread. Only a few fragmentary utterances are given respecting the lives of thousands, nay, millions of actors for more than sixteen centuries! And the history of the whole heathen world is left out, except some black edgings of history, which are so bad that we scarcely can desire to have had more! But even among good men the silences are many, as in the case of Enoch, and Abel, and Seth; of Adam himself, also, after his fall; of the parents of Moses, and Jesse, the father of David; of Caleb, and Jethro, and Obadiah, and Jabez, with many more, all of whom are dismissed with a comparatively brief notice, and yet they are names of which we might well desire to hear more. Indeed, the persons selected for a moderately full notice on the page of Scripture history are very few.

3. They often occur in tenderness. This is specially the case, in the infrequent notices taken of the sins of God's people. A few cases of aggravated offences are mentioned, but what multitudes are passed over in silence! David, by his own account, had so many transgressions to confess before his God that he felt them to be more in number than the hairs on his head (Ps. xl. 12). And of men generally, he says, "Who can understand his errors?" But with the sins which might exist with David before his God men had not to do, and God does not speak of them in the ears of men. It is of those that were a scandal before the world and the Church that open notice is taken in the Book of God. How many sins are "covered" (Ps. xxxii. 1); "removed far away" (Ps. ciii. 12); "blotted out as a thick cloud" (Isa. xliv. 22); "passed by" (Mic. vii. 19); "remembered no more!" (Heb. viii. 12).

4. They illustrate the sovereignty of God in giving to each one his place in history.

Some have a prominent station given them, while to others an obscure or unconspicuous post is assigned. Some receive notice only as "hewers of wood and drawers of water," while others stand forth in the foreground like Joshua, and are made to perform deeds which require a whole Book to preserve a record of them. Gideon's life occupies three long chapters; Zola and Jair together only five verses. Ehud's one deed fills a whole page, while Shamgar's feat is dismissed in a single verse. The story of Deborah and Barak runs on for fully two chapters, while Ibzan, Ebon, and Abdon all three scarcely occupy a moderate paragraph.

There are reasons for this:—

(1.) *God has a plan of Providential dealing with His Church, and He selects instruments that are suitable to that plan.* Hence one is taken and another is left.

(2.) *He has a right to make use of His own creatures as it pleases Him.* They are at His absolute disposal, but men forget what that means. It means they are at the disposal of One whose character is the reverse of that of man, He is One who is so just, that He cannot act unjustly by any of His creatures, so kind, that He cannot act by them unkindly, so wise that He cannot fall into any error in His dealings. No creature can be safer than to leave himself entirely in the hands of his God, doing His will.

(3.) *In His sovereign disposal of men's lot, He always acts from wise and just reasons.*

(4). *None have a right to claim a prominent position at His hands.*

(5.) *Grace always appears with sovereignty in God's dealings with men in this world.* We owe that to the essential character of God, whose "grace never faileth."

New Sins and New Sorrows.

[See Remarks on ch. iii. 12; iv. 1, etc.; vi. 1, etc.]

I. The human heart when left to itself is capable of going the whole round of sin. Here are seven different gods bowed to, and had there been other seven, or even seventy times seven, it would have made no difference in the result. Well might Jehovah say, "My people are bent to backsliding from Me."

2. There is no possibility of serving Jehovah and other gods at the same time. Beginning with an attempt at the combination, they soon gave up even the semblance of worshipping Jehovah (Ezek. xx. 39).

3. There is a fascination in worshipping false gods. The bias of the heart to that worship must have been strong, when such solemn arguments were used all along against it, but in vain. What was the magnetic force that drew them on? (1) There was a charm in mere *scenic representations.* Visibility was given to one's religion, and the senses were exercised rather than the mind. There was music and dancing, and even frivolity mixed up with their religion. (2) In idolatry they had *the power of making gods to their own minds,* and they ascribed to them only such features of character as they wished them to possess. (3) These gods *permitted indulgence in all the evil propensities of the depraved heart*—those "lusts and passions that war against the soul" (Num. xxv.). (4) *The principle of imitation is strong.* All other nations so worshipped. They did not like to be singular. These nations, too, were prosperous and rich.

CHAPTER XI.

CHOICE OF A LEADER; AND SLAUGHTER OF THE ENEMY.

Verses 1-33.

Critical Notes.—1. The Gileadite.] Many regard this as not a definite patronymic, but indicating that he belonged to the clan of the Gileadites. The phrase, *Gilead begat Jephthah,* they suppose to mean that the son of Machir was his ancestor, and add, that his posterity is not more distinctly given because his birth was illegitimate. But this is to put a strain on the passage, for we are told that Jephthah's father had other sons (ver. 2). Gilead here spoken of, then, must have been a descendant of the son of Machir, wearing the same name, for the same names often recurred in Jewish families (see the genealogies in 1 Chron. ii. and iv.) The ancestor of the family is referred to in Num. xxvi. 29. The designation, *Gileadite,* by itself, may be regarded

as a general patronymic, similar to "Elon the Zebulonite" (ch. xii. 11, 12), signifying that he belonged to the family line of the Gileadites, and that one of the line of the same name with the ancestor, Gilead, was his father. It also implies, that Gilead was the country of his birth.

A mighty man of valour] comp. Josh. i. 14; 2 Kings v. 1; also ch. vi. 12, implying great physical strength, boldness and courage. "A man able to endure hardness as a good soldier," "a man that had often done great exploits on the field, and that had looked death in the face on great adventures in the field"—(*Trapp*). This feature is mentioned, as it gave him distinction in such an age, an age of wars and fightings. The son of an harlot.] The sacred penman, with severe impartiality, gives the actual outlines of a man's history, whether for honour or dishonour.

2. Thrust out Jephthah.] From the circumstance of his birth, he was not entitled to share in the paternal inheritance. Not even the children of the secondary wife were so entitled (Gen xxi. 10; xxv. 6). It is probable, that Jephthah from his bold and enterprising spirit, bade fair to take the lead in the general family circle, and so jealousy was awakened.

3 Dwelt in the land of Tob.] 2 Sam. x. 6. Probably some part of Syria, a part on the borders of Gilead, to the north, or north-east. He flees thither as to an asylum, and by constraint. טוֹב *good*, may apply to the land, and signify that the land was fertile. Such a phrase as *eretz tob*, a *good land*, is used in Ex. iii. 8. Yet some suppose it may have been owned by one who was called Tob, on account of his goodness, as Aristides was surnamed "the Just," and Phocion was called "the Good." Of Probus, the Emperor, it was said if he had not already had Probus (the honest) for his name, he would certainly have had it given him for a surname, for he was honest all over. (*Trapp*).

Were gathered unto him vain men.] Rather, they gathered themselves unto him. They were probably attracted to him, partly because he belonged to a family of distinction, but still more by his sterling qualities as a leader of men. Courage, enterprise, and decision of character, are sure to make a following. רֵקִים *vain men.* Men of no moral restraint (see on ch. ix. 4), of loose, perhaps infamous character; for it corresponds with the term "Raca" in Matt. v., which is a term of great reproach. In fact, Jephthah now became an adventurer, not of choice, but through force of circumstances; and "adversity makes us acquainted with strange bedfellows." These were not chosen associates of Jephthah, as was the case with Abimelech (ch. ix. 4), but they had this in common, that they were driven out from the pale of constituted society, and were compelled to lead the life of adventurers. Jephthah, however, could have had no sympathy with anything that was ungodly, or dissolute in character.

They went out with him,] i.e. in any of his adventures. These were necessary as a means of subsistence. Nothing would be more to the taste of such a class of men than a system of freebooting, without regard to moral principle. But to a man of conscience, like Jephthah, such considerations as these would regulate his conduct: The heathen all round were the enemies of the God of Israel, and of the people of Israel; they were long ago marked out for destruction; most of them had already oppressed Israel for years without making compensation; and at the present moment (during the 18 years mentioned), the Ammonites were doing their very utmost to tread down the tribes throughout Gilead to the east of Jordan, his own people. Was he not, therefore, justified in attacking the enemies of his people, and of his God, the same as he would be in fighting a battle with an enemy? Was he not at liberty to despoil those who were already doomed to destruction by Jehovah, at the hand of Israel? A parallel case we have in the history of David (1 Sam. xxii. 2). David made raids from time to time into the countries of the Lord's enemies (1 Sam. xxvii. 8–10; xxx.; also xxiii. 1–5). Jephthah was very successful in these excursions, and so gained a great name as a warrior.

4. In process of time.] After several years, or as the years rolled on. The meaning seems to be, when a considerable period had elapsed after Jephthah's expulsion, and many things had come and gone. When he was expelled, it was the period of the people's sin and impenitence, and not at all unlikely, one of the special items of dislike to him on the part of his brethren, was his staunch loyalty to the God of Israel, while they at that time were idolaters. That he was a true fearer of Jehovah is manifest from the whole account, and he was not likely to learn that lesson in Aram while living among heathen strangers. He must have learned it before leaving his father's house and kindred, for in the darkest nights of Israel's history, there were always some glimmerings of the true light left unextinguished. Jephthah's brethren, being now penitent, and having returned to the worship of Israel's God, would feel that his piety, which they formerly disliked, was one of the best qualifications for his becoming their leader in a battle, which was to be won through the aid of Israel's God.

Made war against Israel.] The historian now returns from his digression to the point stated in ch. x. 17. The Ammonites had for years made many desultory and desolating excursions

into the land of Israel, but now they were collecting their forces for a general subjugation of the country. It was about this period, say some, that the Greeks made war against Troy, and after ten years took it.—*Trapp.*

6. **Come and be our captain.**] Because of his fame as a warrior, and also because of his loyalty to Israel's God. קָצִין a leader in war (Josh. x. 24), and is distinguished in ver. 11 from רֹאשׁ, a chief in peace and war. The former word seems to refer to a temporary appointment, the latter to a permanent office; hence its importance in ver. 9, where רֹאשׁ is used. And the force of the statement is, "If I fight with Ammon as your temporary captain for the battle, and the Lord deliver them into my hand, then I will become your permanent head or judge, or shall I become so?" To this they agreed.

7. **Did ye not hate me and expel me, etc.**] We see nothing very harsh or resentful in these words as some do. A great injury had been done to him in forcing him into exile, and compelling him to lead the life of a guerilla chief for these eighteen years, and the language now used is only what might be expected from a man of proper self-respect. His brethren really did the wrong, but the elders, or leading men in Gilead of that day, seemed to have concurred in the act, or at least could have prevented it.

8. **Therefore we turn to thee now, etc.**] We now come to make amends, and we not only ask thee to fight with us against the children of Ammon, but to be head or ruler over all Gilead.

9. **And the Lord deliver them before me.**] He speaks of God under his covenant name, Jehovah—not Elohim, which last refers equally to all the inhabitants of the world, but the former relates to the special covenant he had made with Israel as a redeemed people. He also looks for victory, not as coming through his own prowess or skill as a general, but as a blessing coming from Jehovah.

Shall I be your head?] Shall I become your permanent ruler or head (as explained in ver. 6)? Or, it will be on condition that I become your permanent head.

10. **The Lord be witness, etc.**] The enemy was at the gate, and there was no time for hesitation. They were glad to get the help of a man like Jephthah, on any terms. They are even willing to make the agreement with the solemnity of an oath, for "an oath for confirmation is to men an end of all strife."

11. **Uttered all his words before the Lord.**] He does everything under Jehovah's immediate inspection and sanction. He generously forgets all former grievances, and forgives as he hoped to be forgiven.

In Mizpeh.] This place from Jacob's time had always more or less of a sacred character. There was set up the heap of stones as a witness before God, that neither Laban nor he should pass it to do the other harm (Gen. xxxi. 49–53). It, afterwards, became the capital of Gilead. It was also one of the 48 Levitical cities given to that sacred tribe, among all the other tribes (Josh. xxi. 38), and it was one of the six cities of refuge (Josh. xx. 8). In these verses it is spoken of as Ramoth-in-Gilead. The special presence of God was supposed to be with the tabernacle, with the ark, or with the priest officiating clothed with the ephod. This latter may have been the case here.

12. **What hast thou to do with me?**] He now speaks in name of the nation, having been chosen their captain. His first step is to try to settle the dispute peacefully, according to the law of his God (Deut. xx. 10). Even the Romans held that all things ought to be tried first before war.

13. **Israel took away my land, &c.**] This was a mere pretext for a quarrel. A district of fertile land lying between Arnon on the south, and Jabbok on the north, enclosed by Jordan on the west, and the wilderness on the east, did at one time belong to the Moabites, or Ammonites, or both; for being both sons of Lot and brethren, they are often spoken of as if they were but one nation (see Num. xxi. 26-30). But that territory was taken from them by Sihon, king of the Amorites, so that when Israel, at their entrance into Canaan, passed along, they found it to be a part of the kingdom of Sihon, and as they conquered Sihon in turn, it naturally fell into their hands; yet, in no sense, as a portion of Moab or Ammon, but as a division of the kingdom of Sihon (v. 22; Deut. iii. 16; Josh. xiii. 25). "The Arnon (rushing stream) empties itself into the Dead Sea, mid-way down on the east side (Num. xxi. 13). The Jabbok (pourer) rises in the mountains of Gilead, and empties itself into the Jordan, near the city of Adam" (Josh. iii. 16) (*Lias*).

14. **Sent messengers again.**] He was a man of robust intellect, as well as robust body, and saw through the flimsiness of the pretext in a moment.

15. **Thus saith Jephthah.**] He recapitulates all the facts bearing on the case, and shows how fully he was acquainted with all God's past dealings towards his covenant people. Like Moses

in the desert, or like David in the cave, he must have occupied much of his time in that foreign land, in meditating on the mighty acts of the Lord towards His chosen people.

17. Sent messengers to the King of Edom . . . and to the King of Moab, etc.] These peoples were descendants of Esau and of Lot, and the Israelites were forbidden to attack any of them (Deut. ii. 5, 9, 19; 2 Chron. xx. 10). So "Israel abode in Kadesh," when these kings refused to grant them liberty to pass through. They took no step to force a passage, though they were well able to do so.

18. Compassed the land of Edom and of Moab.] Took a long and fatiguing journey round these territories, that they might not come within the borders of Moab nor yet of Edom (Num. xxi. 4, 11, 13; xxii. 36; Deut. ii. 1–12).

19, 20. Let us pass through thy land unto my place, etc.] Even Sihon was not attacked by Israel, but the Amorite king himself brought on the war which took place (Num. xxi. 21–25; Deut. ii. 26–34).

22. They possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon to Jabbok, and from the wilderness to Jordan.] This was the territory in dispute, and Jephthah shows how it came into Israel's possession. It was not taken by Israel from Moab, for at that time Moab had it not. Israel too showed a jealous care not to touch anything that belonged to Moab, being forbidden by Jehovah to do so. What took place before that, between the Amorites and Moab, Israel had nothing to do with—it was a piece of past history. But Israel took it from a king by whom they were attacked in war.

23. The Lord God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites, etc.] (Deut. ii. 32–37). The blessed and only Potentate did so. There could be no higher title to any possession than this. "The God that made the world and all things therein . . . determines for men the bounds of their habitation" (Acts xvii. 24, 26; Dan. iv. 25). At the first, "the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance" (Deut. xxxii. 8). The Lord of the whole earth (Ps. xxiv. 1) has a right to give any part of it to whomsoever he pleaseth. The complaint now made was really a complaint against the doing of the God of Israel.

24. That which Chemosh thy god giveth thee.] He appeals to their own principles of action. They were accustomed to hold that what their god gave them they had the fullest right to possess, for no law was higher with them than the decision of their god. Had not Israel then the same high title to possess that which their God gave them? This was unanswerable reasoning (Deut. ix. 3, 5; xviii. 12; Josh. iii. 10). Ammon and Moab got possession of the territory they then had, by forcibly driving out its previous possessors (Deut. ii. 10–22).

25. Art thou anything better than Balak, etc.?] Jephthah knew the whole history well, and could reason upon it equally well. He means, art thou better than the King of Moab of that day? Yet he never disputed Israel's title to the possession of that which they took from Sihon, when they had conquered him in battle. And if Moab's king at the time did not find fault, why raise a dispute now after the lapse of 300 years? There was now a prescriptive right. "A title so long unquestioned, was to be presumed to be unquestionable"—(*Bush*). Balak did indeed hire Baalam to curse Israel, but not because he wished thereby to recover the lost portion of land, but his object was to save his crown itself and the kingdom which he possessed. Ammon and Moab went together in this nefarious attempt (Deut. xxiii. 4). They were brethren. "Moab was the more civilised and agricultural, Ammon the more fierce, Bedouin-like and marauding half of Lot's descendants (Isa. xv., xvi.; Jer. xlviii.; comp. with 1 Sam. xi. 2; Amos i. 13; 2 Sam. x. 1–5; xii. 31)"—(*Fausset*).

27. Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, &c.] I have the land by *right of conquest*, the same as that by which you own your own territory. I have it by the *gift* of *our God*, who is the Sovereign Proprietor of heaven and earth. And I have it by the right of *long unquestioned possession*.

The Lord be judge, etc.] He leaves the matter in the hands of the Sovereign "Judge of all the earth." It is clear that throughout this chapter, Jephthah "acknowledged the Lord in all his ways," believing that "He would direct his steps."

28. Hearkened not to the words of Jephthah.] Though the reasoning was most conclusive. His purpose to fight was already fixed. It was a case of the wolf and the lamb. God hardened his heart, for He purposed to destroy him for lifting his hand against the people of God.

29. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah.] Already he had the spirit of grace, now he got the spirit of power (see on ch. iii. 10; vi. 34). The effect was to raise him above his natural level in courage, strength, boldness, and wisdom. This was the crowning proof that Jehovah had

chosen Jephthah, and not the elders of Israel merely, to be the leader in this important crisis. It was the same as if a horn of oil had been poured on his head. It was also an indication of the fact, that victory was to come, not by natural energy or skill, "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit saith the Lord."

Passed over Gilead and Manasseh.] To collect an army, in Reuben, Gad, and the tribe of Manasseh east. Mizpeh of Gilead is specially mentioned as being the rendezvous for all public assemblies of the people, on the east side of Jordan. The reasons are given above under v. 11. It is called Mizpeh of Gilead, to distinguish it from Mizpeh of Judah, a town about 20 miles to the south of Jerusalem (1 Sam. vii. 5-7; Josh. xv. 21, 38), but some place it in Benjamin (Josh. xviii. 26).

32. The Lord delivered them into his hands.] No account is given of the particular means employed. But when God's hand is specially engaged, it is easy with him to set 1000 springs in operation, in the most natural way, to bring out victory. Whatever was fitted to hamper, to enfeeble, to disconcert, or strike with panic the forces of the enemy, was set agoing. Whatever was needful to encourage, to embolden, and to give fresh strength to His own people, was furnished by the God of battles. A very great slaughter followed, and twenty cities fell into the hands of the victors.

33 The children of Ammon were subdued, etc.] A single verse is reckoned sufficient to tell the great decision, whether the dark cloud which had hung over Israel for many years was to continue, and grow darker still, or whether light, liberty, and joy were again to visit the homes of the children of the covenant. But nearly two chapters are taken up with getting the people's sins disposed of, and the arguments of the case set forth.

The word וַיִּכָּנְעוּ signifies *greatly brought down*, or laid very low. Their pride was humbled, and their strength was utterly broken; so it usually fared with those who dared to attack the people of the living God. They were not merely defeated, but the defeat became a rout, and indeed ruin. None of those who oppressed Israel, after God's controversy with His people was closed, could lift up their heads a second time. Here the word might be translated *Canaanised* (*Bush*).

HOMILETIC REMARKS.

Verses 1–33.

The Exile Leader, and a Great Triumph.

I. Every man has his starting point in life fixed by God.

All do not enter on the race of life with the same advantages. Some are born king's sons, and have the prestige of royalty at every step they take. Others are the children of parents of high rank and great wealth, to whom many doors of ease and enjoyment, as well as an honourable position in life, are thrown open. But a far larger number are born to tread more among thorns than flowers, and have to climb hard, ere they reach a respectable elevation in society. Others still are born under the shadow of reproach, and have from the first to fight their way through a strong prejudice, which it may take many years to dispel. Thus it was with Jephthah, who in early life was banned even from the society of his own brethren, because of the illegitimacy of his birth, and had at length to flee into a land of strangers. There was no blame on his part; but in God's Providence, this cloud came over him through the sin of his parents.

Similar are the disadvantages, with which many have to contend in fighting the battle of life. How many are born with sickly constitutions, so that many things are a burden or a labour to them, which are a light exercise to others. How many are blind, or have weak eyesight from the first, or are maimed, or deformed. How many have dissolute parents, have uncomfortable homes, are clothed in rags, and see only spectacles of misery and squalor from day to day.

How many have to toil hard for the bare necessaries of life, want the means of a liberal education, and have no influential friends to take them by the hand in climbing up the ladder.

In one aspect of the case, this fixing of a man's starting point is the arrangement of God, for it is He who determines every man's lot. Yet it is also true that "when a man's ways please the Lord" (whatever his station in life) He not only gives him promotion, but "maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. xvi. 7), Ps. lxxv. 6, 7.

II. Much of a man's future in life depends on himself.

This must be taken in connection with the former remark. Jonathan was a king's son, but he had a wicked father, and he knew from his youth that the wicked father's son would not inherit the throne of Israel. Yet notwithstanding this blight in his early hopes, he did not quarrel with the position which God had given him, but nobly turned round and said to David, "Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee." That honour denied him, he sought another distinction, that of being a man of strong faith in his God. Such deeds did he perform through that faith, that his name illumines some of the brightest chapters of the Book of God, and stands higher through all time than if he had worn a crown.

Had Jephthah sat down sullenly as an ill-fated man, complained, as an ungodly man would have done, that the fates were against him, or that God had taken a grudge against him, and begun to cherish a gloomy, perhaps a reckless and misanthropic spirit, he would never have risen in the scale in after life. Nor would Joseph have done so, if he had given way to hard thoughts of God, when cast into the pit, or sold for a slave, falsely accused, and immured within the walls of an Egyptian prison. Nor would David have risen to eminence, if, when chased like a roe among the mountains, he had lost all hope in God, and become demoralised. Every man is bound to make the most of his position, and, like the woman of Zarephath, to gather the two sticks that are left to prepare the last meal, in the faith that the covenant God will not let the barrel of meal waste, nor the cruse of oil fail, till the day that He shall send rain on the earth (I. Kings xvii. 12–16).

III. Disaffection in a family circle brings chastisement sooner or later.

If it were undutifulness to parents, the sentence according to the Mosaic law was most severe. It was the first commandment in the Second Table of the Law, to honour parents, and often breaches of that commandment were visited with death (Ex. xxi. 13, 17; Deut. xxi. 18–21), or some severe penalty (Prov. xxx. 17; I. Tim. i. 9; Rom. i. 30, 32); or if disaffection break out among brethren, we have a strong illustration of the Divine scourge coming down in after years, in the case of Joseph's brethren (comp. Gen. xxxvii. with ch. xlii. 21, 22). To what a humiliation had Jephthah's brethren to submit, when, in after years, they had to journey into a far country to seek out him whom they had driven out, and implore him to come to their rescue in the day of their extremity! What earnest charges are given against brethren falling out among one another (Gen. xlv. 24; Matt. xx. 24–28; II. Cor. xii. 20, 21; James iii. 16; iv. 1, etc.)

IV. Adversity in youth is often a blessing (Lam. iii. 27–33).

The man whom God sent into Egypt to provide the staff of bread for His people in days of famine, "was sold for a slave (while yet a youth), his feet were

hurt with fetters, and he was laid in irons," etc. (Ps. cv. 17–22). Joseph, the indulged child, could never have acquired the capacity of dealing with men with firmness, sagacity, and good judgment, as ruler over all the land of Egypt, had he not been taken by God's own far-seeing hand, and set to learn hard lessons in the school of sharp affliction. David learned much during the years that his life was sought by the envious king of Israel, and also while he was in the cave of Adullam, and living actually in the very country of the Philistines. Jacob, Moses, and others, would never have been the men whom they became, had they not been well schooled in adversity, at the beginning of their public life. Many have had reason to say, "It was good for me that I was afflicted."

Jephthah, too, led by the kind hand of God's Providence, was taught to "scorn delights, and live laborious days" in his early youth, little knowing at the time, that he was thus really being sent to school, to learn lessons which he could learn so well in no other way, and which were essential to fit him for the great work marked out for him to perform, and the high position he was to occupy in God's Church in after years.

V. The righteous and the wicked are often compelled to live together in this world.

When driven from his home in Gilead, Jephthah appears to have gone to his mother's country in Aram, or that part of Syria, which is just across the boundary line from Israel, in the north-east. It was a land of idols, yet Jephthah had lived long enough in Israel to acquire a considerable knowledge of Israel's God, and no truth makes so deep an impression on the heart that really receives it, as this truth. So he still lived an Israelite, while surrounded by idolaters. Men came around him whom he did not care to seek, and with whose spirit he had no sympathy—men who were unprincipled in character, and abandoned in their conduct, but who, being outlaws, like himself, and in need of a captain, were attracted by the robust strength and imperial bearing of this stalwart Gileadite. They would naturally also acknowledge him all the more readily, as he belonged to what was reckoned a good family in Manasseh, and already some favourable rumours were heard, respecting his feats in arms against the neighbouring nations.

Thus was Jephthah compelled to live with many men who "had no fear of God before their eyes." On his part, to have a following was a necessity, both, like David, as a protection for his person, and also as a means of fighting the battles of his country and his God. Thus did David (1 Sam. xxii. 2, etc.; xxiii. 1–5; xxvii. 8, 9). Besides, Jephthah, like David, was not in a position to choose his company. Idolaters were round him on all sides. These exiles, if they were, or if most of them were, desperadoes, were still the only human beings he could associate with. He would have required to have "gone out of the world," if he had determined to keep free of the company of the wicked altogether (1 Cor. v. 9, 10). That Jephthah should have consented to act with these men, was not a matter of preference or of choice, but of pure necessity. If this is not expressly stated, it is at least as fair an inference as any other, and harmonises well with his general character.

While a good man is on earth, he will always have something in his surroundings, to remind him that he is in the enemy's country, that it is earth and not heaven. While the people of God are yet only travelling in the wilderness, "a mixed multitude" travel step by step with them. But when they come to cross Jordan, only the circumcised shall be allowed to enter Canaan. There they shall have only their "own company." Here we must act as far as possible by the rule, "Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together." When it is

a matter of desire, our prayer should be: "Gather not my soul with sinners." But when necessity leads us to perform the duties of life in company with the wicked, our prayer should be, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

VI. The same actions may be good or evil, as they are done from right or wrong motives.

If Jephthah and his followers were exiles, or outlaws, the force of their circumstances in such an age, would naturally lead them to act as adventurers. That they made raids in different directions, or prosecuted this kind of life more or less, seems to be implied in the statement, "they went out with him." To the followers, mere pillage or robbery would doubtless be the chief impelling motive, or, we may add to that, the love of adventure. But to a man of conscience like Jephthah, the guiding motive would be, to do battle against the enemies of Jehovah, and to give suitable recompense for all the wrongs they had done to his people. All the nations were of this category, so that wherever he turned, the same rule of action would hold good (see Crit. Notes on v. 3). Thus the same action was to Jephthah the fulfilment of a sacred duty, while to his followers, it was an action of robbery and brigandage. It is also important to remember, that the whole of these heathen lands, north and south, east and west, were gifted to Israel, and the destruction of their inhabitants was appointed to God's people as a duty to be fulfilled. All this would be present to the mind of Jephthah, and give another and totally opposite complexion to the acts, from that which they had in the case of his associates, who did what they did as mere plunderers.

In like manner, any offering made to God, good in itself, may become an abomination, when the motives in the heart are those of hypocrisy, or otherwise displeasing to God (Prov. xv. 8; Isa. i. 11-15). The kiss of salutation, in the way of acknowledging each other as Christian brethren, was well-pleasing to God, but the kiss of Judas in betraying his Master was diabolically bad. To eat flesh that had been offered to idols, was, to an enlightened Christian, nothing more than the means of good nourishment, and most lawful to do, but to eat such, in the presence of one whose conscience felt such an act to be a stumbling-block to his faith, was positively sinful.

VII. God's choice of instruments to do His work often appears singular in the estimation of men.

Who could have looked for any good thing coming out of the land of Tob—a land beyond the boundary of Israel, and where idolatry was universal? Who could have supposed that the illegitimate son of Gilead's family, whose mother was a heathen and a stranger to Israel's God, and who himself in early boyhood was shunned and scowled upon by all the family circle, and was at length so persecuted at home, that he was obliged to take refuge in a foreign land—who could have supposed, that he should become one day the only man, among all the thousands of Israel, that was found qualified to occupy the post of Judge in Israel, and Leader of the hosts of the Lord against the invasion of the enemy. Truly, this was a rose springing up among thorns—staunch loyalty to Jehovah's name amid surrounding treason, like that of the few solitary faithful ones in Sardis, whose undefiled garments do not escape the notice of Him, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (Rev. iii. 4). God saw the affliction of his boyhood, and made him a child of His grace. Having begun the good work, He keeps him by his mighty power through faith against all the temptations of the wicked (Rev. iii. 10). Thence Jephthah, when called

for to do God's work, is found to be a man of decided piety. Despised by all around him, with a ring of marauders hailing him as their captain, and an exile from his people and home, this man seemed little likely to be of any use to the church of God in his generation. But "God seeth not as man seeth." Under the unpromising exterior, He beheld the germ of a thoroughly religious character, and in His holy Providence He made "the last first, and the first last." Jephthah's name went down into the Book of God's remembrance, and that of the Church's remembrance, as a good name (Heb. xi. 32), a pearl among dross, a child of God among children of the wicked one.

How like is this picture to that of Jephthah's great antitype, who was "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," yet in due time was exalted to be "the man of God's right hand." "The stone which the builders rejected became the head of the corner."

It illustrates also the difference between God's estimation and man's estimation of human character (i. Sam. xvi. 6-12; Luke vii. 37-50; James iv. 4; Mark xii. 41, &c.; Luke xvi. 15; Heb. xi. 38, 39).

VIII. God's wisdom and love in seeming to forget His people's sufferings.

For the larger part, if not the whole, of the 18 years of the enemy's oppression, and perhaps longer still, did Jephthah remain in the land of his exile. It must have seemed to him long, very long, to be deprived of having any fellowship with God's people in their religious exercises, and he must often have prayed very earnestly for a restoration of his captivity in language similar to that of Psalm xlii. It must have seemed as if God had forgotten His word (Ps. cxix. 49). And so have others of God's people often felt (Ps. lxxiv. 1, 10, 11; lxxvii. 7-10). The children of Abraham were kept for more than two generations in the iron furnace in Egypt, yet all the while the Divine pity was felt, and kept looking down with intense sympathy on the scene presented. "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them." Wisdom and love were at work all the time, deciding the best time and mode of deliverance.

But in Jephthah's case, as in David's, the long delay previous to his great public work was needed, to build up a character suitable to the greatness of that work. The seven or more years of David's wanderings among wildernesses, and pits, and caves, and mountains, and valleys, were well occupied in the bringing forth of those clear crystal effusions of a pious heart, which we find in many of the precious Psalms. There is the 63rd for example; we have to thank the wilderness of Judah for that. To his flight beyond Jordan, and its long continuance we owe the 42nd. To his narrow escape from Saul, we owe the 57th; and to his danger when among the Philistines we owe the 56th; so with others. What a loss to the Church of God in all ages, not to have had these genuine outpourings of a pious heart, in the midst of overwhelming troubles. Hence the far-seeing wisdom and love of God, that arranged such a course of life for David.

Thus it was with Jephthah. His many years in the land of Tob, we verily believe he spent more in intercourse with his God, than with his associates in adversity. It would be a relief to him to ponder over from day to day the marvellous history, which Moses and Joshua had left behind them of God's mighty acts of love, and power on behalf of His people; in proof of which, we have a specimen of the accuracy and fulness of his knowledge, in his reasoning with the King of Ammon. Little is indeed recorded, but when it is so, we are to take it, that that little is but a specimen of more that might have been given.

IX. It is wise to make the best of one's circumstances, however adverse.

Many would have said, in his circumstances, that it was of no use to try to do anything to better one's position, or even to do anything for the glory of God, and the good of His church. But this man of faith improved such opportunities as he had, and gained such a name for zeal in vindicating the cause of Jehovah, and such fame as a warrior in the field, that all eyes were turned to him in the day of Israel's distress. He was the first who dared to attack the Ammonites on this occasion, and, according to a public resolution come to, he was chosen to be the captain of Israel's army (ch. x. 18).

X. How legible the records of Scripture history are, compared with those of profane history.

How clear and distinct in every line is the account here given of what took place in Jephthah's days! Yet this is supposed to be about the time of the Trojan war, ending in the overthrow of that famous town by the Greeks. That is reckoned to be about the dawn of general history outside the Bible; and yet even that is so much under a haze, that it is difficult to say how much of the account is truth, and how much is fable. Even before this time, as far back as the days of Moses, the ink seems yet scarcely dry on the page (if the expression might be allowed), everything being so fresh and legible, while all profane records, even of a date less remote, seem covered with lichen, or are musty and moth-eaten.

XI. The unwisdom of despising anyone in the day of prosperity.

The brethren of Jephthah were foolish enough to do this, and lived afterwards bitterly to lament it. God has so dovetailed society together, and made one part so necessary to another (as in the case of the human body), that in many cases, that member of it whom we think we may frown upon or injure at pleasure, may turn out at another time to be a most valuable auxiliary. God has it all arranged in His plan, that now one, now another, of our fellow creatures, shall serve us materially at certain points of our history, and as we do not know who these persons are, our wisdom is to despise no one, but live in amity and peace with all. This is only in conformity with the great law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Jephthah might be base in the estimation of his brethren, but the day came round, when both they and the brethren of Joseph found it was a capital error to despise their brother. "Base things of the world, and things which are not, hath God chosen to bring to nought things that are." "Kings often despise their soldiers, until such times as their crowns begin to hang on the one side of their heads."—[*Trapp.*]

A good many years ago, a young man who had been brought up in a religious family circle in Scotland, went out to India to join the army there. He took with him all the peculiarities of the somewhat antiquated and austere school of religion in which he had been trained, including not only the practice of prayer and reading of the Scriptures twice a day, and his strict observance of the Lord's Day, but also such matters as the great length of his prayers, the blessing asked before meat, and the thanks returned after it being also of unusual length, the quaint nature of the language used, and the quaint tone in which it was spoken, his manifold scruples of conscience to joining with his comrades in any practice, important or unimportant, which he thought to be wrong, with many other points of a similar character. These soon drew down upon him a storm of ridicule from the officers of the regiment to which he belonged. He became the butt of innumerable taunts and jeers, his religious profession was treated with constant derision, and every day for years the artillery of reproach was more or less directed against him. In silence and in

meekness he endured it all. After some years, a dreadful plague broke out in the camp. Many were laid low and many died. So virulent was the nature of the malady, that none had the courage to approach the victims to supply them with the means of healing. Now was the opportunity for the man of prayer. Fearlessly he entered the area where death was doing its work. He alone day after day stood at the bedsides of the dying, doing the duty of physician, nurse, and chaplain; and he alone had the courage to prepare the dead for a decent sepulture. At length the plague was stayed, and he who formerly had been the object of so much insult and mockery now rose to the rank of a hero. No man was so highly honoured. The last became first, and he was promoted at once from the rank of cadet to that of captain A prayer meeting under his auspices was opened, which soon became numerously attended, and ere long a second meeting was opened, the culmination of which was, that a revival of religion took place amid signal marks of the Divine blessing. "Them that honour me I will honour."

XII. Confession is better than prevarication (vers. 7, 8).

It is nobler to confess at once frankly we have done wrong, and are come to make amends, than to begin partly to deny and partly to palliate, the unworthy act of days gone by (Prov. xxviii. 13; Gen. xxxvii. 31, 32; with xlii. 21, 22; 1 Kings xviii. 17, 18).

XIII. A pious character formed diligently in secret will sooner or later be justified openly.

Whatever men's first impressions might be about this young man who was banished from his home, when God's time came for a revelation of his true character, there could be no mistake about the spirit of loyalty to his God which he had cultivated, when there was no eye upon him. He began by not fighting with his brethren, but acknowledged the disadvantage arising from his birth (Deut. xxiii. 2). He submitted to lead the life of an adventurer. He did not worship strange gods in a heathen land. Afterwards, when it was in his power, he did not take revenge on his brethren by refusing to agree to their requests. He looked for all success as coming only from the God of Israel. The fight he entered into with Ammon was only for the glory of the God of Israel, and not for showing his own prowess. He puts the whole transaction before God in prayer, and by a solemn service, ere he takes a single step in carrying out his mission. All these and other points come out at last in connection with this man's character, and show how high it stood with God (Prov. iv. 18; Job xvii. 9; Acts vii. 35–38; 1 Sam. xvii. 34–37).

XIV. To look for God's presence and blessing in all our work is the sure way to success (vers. 10, 11).

He acknowledges that all victory comes, not through his prowess or skill, but solely from the God of Israel; and he seems to hint that now, when the people are truly mourning for their sins, there was a good hope that God would deliver the enemy into their hands. This spirit of Jephthah is yet more clearly shown by his "uttering all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh." In every step he took in so solemn a transaction he called God to witness. David did this continually, and Jephthah, like David, has prospered whithersoever he went. "I have set the Lord always before me" is the proper rule of guidance for every good man (Prov. iii. 6; Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6, lxxx. 16, 17).

XV. It is better to go round about to do what is right, than to go straightforward to do what is wrong.

To have gone straightforward through either Edom or Moab forcibly, on their way to the promised land, would have been for Israel the practical breach of a Divine command, for God had given the one territory to the children of Esau for an inheritance, and the other in like manner to the children of Lot. There are many things in life, where it would save us much trouble if we could get at them directly, instead of having to make a wide detour to the right hand or the left. Israel made a long journey to keep by the right (Deut. ii. 5-9).

XVI. Past history is full of instruction for the actors in the present (Verses 16-27; Rom. xv. 4; 1 Cor. x. 11).

XVII. When God appoints a man to do a special work, He gives him special qualifications for it.

He sends none a warfare on their own charges. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah." This was done specially to endow him with every gift and grace that he might require for the fulfilment of his arduous work. Thus was Joshua endowed (Josh. i. 5, 7). Jeremiah (ch. i. 17-19). David (Ps. lxxi. 16), and even the Messiah Himself (Isa. lxi. 1; xi. 2, 3).

JEPHTHAH'S VOW.

(Verses 30, 31, 34-40.)

CRITICAL NOTES.—30. **Vowed a vow unto the Lord.**] He looked entirely to Jehovah for victory (Ps. xviii. 2, 6, 29, etc.; lxii. 6-8; xlvi. 1, 2-7; cxviii. 6-13; cxxi. 1, 2). From first to last, He sees God's overruling Providence preserving His church. He recognises this when treating with the elders of Gilead (ver. 9, 10), when he accepted the office of captain (ver. 11), when he spoke of the past victories of Israel (ver. 21, 23, 24, 27), and now when about to contend with the enemy in battle (ver. 30). As if by instinct he turns to his great refuge in the time of danger. The vow was an engagement that if God should put forth His power on his behalf he would offer something as a sacrifice, not only in acknowledgment of God's goodness but of his own increased obligation to love and serve Him as his God.

If thou shalt without fail deliver.] *lit., If giving thou shalt give.* The doubling of the phrase, so common in the Hebrew, always implies additional strength of statement.

31. **Whatsoever cometh forth, etc.**] Heb. *That which coming forth shall have come forth*—a doubling of the statement as in ver. 30, and having the force of saying, "assuredly what comes forth, etc., shall be the Lord's." Many read *whosoever*, but it would be grammatically proper to read either way. The text does not determine certainly, whether a human being or a beast was present to the mind of the speaker. The rendering in the A.V. appears to be preferable, because it leaves the object entirely undefined, which was the real state of the vower's mind. To get quit of the difficulty, some would render the ו by *or*, turning the copulative into a disjunctive. We cannot agree with *Keil*, who says that it never has this sense, for see Ex. xxi. 15; 2 Sam. ii. 19. It is, however, a rare use of the particle, and *Keil's* statement, that it is to be taken here as *explanatory*, must be accepted as just. To offer up the object as a burnt offering is not an alternative to the consecration of it to the Lord, but an explanation of the manner in which the purpose of so consecrating it was to be carried out (see *Bush*). Another attempt to solve the difficulty is that made by *Dr. Randolph*, who would read the last clause—*and I would offer (to Him) a burnt offering*—an ingenious conjecture, but it simply amounts to the foisting of a meaning into the text, instead of taking one out of it. The suffix pronoun הָ added to the verb in Hebrew is always the objective to the verb, not to a preposition, unless that is expressed. We prefer the rendering given in the A.V. to any other.

Jephthah, we believe, was at this moment greatly agitated, under a sense of the vast responsibility which rested on him as having to "order the battle." He was in deep waters and the floods were overflowing him. It would be a strong additional obligation to him to be the Lord's, and to live to Him a more devoted life, were He but to give deliverance at such a

crisis. As expressive of this felt obligation, there must be some outward sign. That sign naturally took the form of a sacrificial offering on the altar; but so flurried was he in spirit, that he could not make up his mind as to what the object should be. He therefore leaves it to God to "provide Himself with a lamb for a burnt offering." The object was thus *entirely undefinite to Jephthah's mind.*

34. **His daughter came out to meet him with timbrels.**] It was customary, in those times, for the women to go forth to meet the conquerors on their return, with songs of joy and with dances (1 Sam. xviii. 6; Ex. xv. 20). A whole choir of maidens would doubtless come, but Jephthah's daughter was the leader. **She was his only child.**] A term of special endearment (Zech. xii. 10; Gen. xxii. 2, 16). His wife might have had children by a former husband, but this was the only child whom he had. The phrase מִבַּלְעָדָיו seems to mean "besides her," in which case there must have been no other family in the household.

35. **When he saw her he rent his clothes.**] He was completely taken by surprise. He had never imagined this as possible, when he made his vow. Whether he then had thought of any other human sacrifice, it is clear, it had never crossed his mind, that his own daughter might possibly be the victim. Indeed it suggests the doubt, whether he had the idea of any *human* sacrifice in his mind at all. Certainly nothing seemed to him more unexpected, or was farther from his thoughts, than that she whom "he most tenderly loved should be laid on the altar as a sacrifice unto the Lord."

He rent his clothes.] He tore his clothes in anguish, the usual symptom of a distracted mind (Lev. x. 6; Gen. xxxvii. 29; Job i. 20). "Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, etc.") Heb. *Bowing thou hast made me to bow.* The repeating of the word a second time gives empasis to the statement; as if he meant to say, my hopes are crushed; my spirit is broken; a blacker grief has come down on me than that from which I have just been delivered. Instead of returning to my home to enjoy peace, thou art become the occasion of more trouble to me than the Ammonites have been. As David was troubled by Absalom; or Jacob by his sons, when they sold their brother for a slave; or as the Saviour himself was troubled by his own people, the Jews, so Jephthah was now to find in his own daughter, the greatest trouble of his life—in perfect innocence on her part, and through rash presumption on his part.

"I have opened my mouth to the Lord, etc." (Num. xxx. 2; Deut. xxiii. 21-23; Ps. cxviii. 14, 18; lxvi. 13, 14). "I cannot revoke it."

36. **Do to me according to that which hath proceeded, etc.**] The whole conversation is not here given. At the close of ver. 35 there appears to be a hiatus; at which point, Jephthah would explain to his daughter what he had done in the transaction between him and his God. In the full view of the sacrifice she was suddenly called upon to make, she uttered the noble words of this verse. She would doubtless take a little time to deliberate, that she might fully weigh the case; and then she shows how well she could rise with the occasion.

There is no wild screaming against the terrible fate that was so suddenly presented to her; no positive determination to resist for this once the excessive tax made on her filial obedience; no upbraiding of her father for his rash vow; no proposal to obtain a substitute; and no attempt to fly for her life to a foreign land. There is a calm willingness to accept the sad consequences of her father's error, since now it cannot be altered, and a noble resolution to sacrifice all that was dear in life in the interests of God's Church, and for the glory of God's name. A whole cluster of virtues opens out in this beautiful character. (1.) *Filial dutifulness.* "My father has done it; I will submit at once." (2.) *Zeal for the cause of God.* "I am nothing; the cause of God is everything." (3.) *A complete renunciation of her share of worldly honours.* "A fair morning dawns on others; I am willing that night should fall on me." (4.) *Unselfishness.* "The other maidens may continue their singing and dancing; I accept the lot of the mourner, and the forlorn." (5.) *Willingness to lose life itself at God's call.* "It is my God that calls me; I am ready to surrender every prospect I have in life to please Him." Comp. the case of Isaac (Gen. xxii.).

37. **Let me alone for two months.**] This would be said after some reflection. Even this proposal is mentioned as a request of her father. Mizpeh stood on an eminence. Hence it was proper to speak even of going down to the mountains. **And bewail my virginity.**] To be a wife and mother was the supreme desire of Israelitish women. Ever from the time that it was said, the great Messiah was to be "the seed of the woman," and to be "born of a woman," it was reckoned the blessing of Heaven to become a mother. In like manner to be barren, or to die childless, was regarded as a curse (Ps. lxxviii. 63). Compare the cases of Hannah, Rachel, Sarah, and others. Perpetual virginity was among the Israelites a condition of deep reproach, as is strikingly pourtrayed in Isa. iv. 1; also in Luke i. 25; Jer. xvi. 9; vii. 34; contrasted with Ps. cxxvii. 3-5; Zach. viii. 5.

Go up and down among the mountains.] Heb. *go to, and go down*, meaning—go to the mountains, and down to the valleys between them, to get seclusion from the world To

"bewail" is to *weep over*, and the cause of weeping was the perpetuation of her virginity. It is not said her *sacrifice*, which is important to notice. The word used comes from בְּתוּל *a virgin*, implying that she was to remain in a fixed state of virginity; and no mention is made of death.

39. Did with her according to his vow.] Heb. *he did to her his vow—i.e.*, fulfilled his vow in regard to her, but not a word as to *the manner*, except the clause which follows, "and she knew no man." Had the original text been *according to his vow*, the natural interpretation would have been, that he offered her for a burnt offering. But the phrase "did to her his vow" simply means, that he carried his vow into execution, without saying in what manner he did so. He kept his word to his God. But he may have done so in the spirit of the meaning, though not in the letter. Had he done so in the letter, we should have expected, when the matter was so important, that the narrator would have said, "he executed his vow, and offered her for a burnt offering unto the Lord." But in place of this, we have the statement, "he did his vow to her, and she knew no man." This last statement looks like a finger pointing to what he actually did—in which case the interpretation would be, that she was devoted to a life of celibacy. Knew.] Perfect tense. Not *had known*. It refers to the *future*, not the *past*.

A custom in Israel.] Lit. an ordinance, or an established custom.

40. Yearly.] Lit. *from days to days*, or from year to year (Ex. xiii. 10). It was an annual practice.

To lament the daughter, &c.] The more correct translation would be to *praise*, or to celebrate the praises of—לְתַנּוֹת is only once used elsewhere in Scripture (Jud. v. 11), where it is translated "rehearse," and could not mean "lament." Some make it "talk with," as if they condoled with her in her hapless state [*Kimchi*]. This would imply that she was still alive. But if we take the more commonly received interpretation, "to celebrate the praises of," it implies that something like a festival was kept. Analogous to this, the Greek Artemis, the virgin who went about alone, without companions, like the moon in the sky, had her praises celebrated by Greek maidens, because she lived in a state of virginity. In many places they kept festival with song and dance in her honour, not because she died as a virgin, but because her life was spent in virginity.

Interpretation of the Vow.

This, like many other questions in Scripture history, has been keenly contested for many centuries, without an explanation being arrived at in which all could agree. This is mainly due to the elliptical character of the account given. It is plain, that if only one or two sentences of information had been added, the haze would have been removed which now hangs over the narrative. But to retain that haze seems, for wise and holy reasons, to be intentional on the part of Him who gave the "Holy oracles." Indeed, it appears to be a principle of the Scripture record, in many an important paragraph, to withhold from us some of the elements of the case narrated, and leave the points not given to be found out by inference from the details which are given. This leads the minds of the readers to the healthful exercise of examining more minutely all the recorded details, and sifting more carefully their exact meaning, gathering up the whole information and comparing part with part in the most thorough manner, so as to discover the unknown. It is a higher wisdom which conceals a part, instead of leaving nothing to be found out. One result is, a far more diligent and complete search of Scripture than would be made, if nothing were left to whet the appetite for discovery. Another result is, that Scripture becomes a Book of continual freshness, according to the great variety of lights and shades which fall on the page from the speculations of differently constituted minds.

But the enigma in Jephthah's history, we humbly think, has been made more of a riddle than it really is; and, certainly, it has received a measure of discussion far beyond what the value of its moral teaching would justify; though that is not inconsiderable. Its interest, at first sight, lies in the touching and

romantic character of the incident itself. It sheds also a strong light on the religious character of the two persons chiefly concerned; and we cannot wonder that the sacred writer should have thought, that the unflinching decision to adhere to the principles of true piety at any cost, on the part of both, was worthy of being recorded for everlasting remembrance. Looked at deeper still, an important lesson is taught, about the necessity of the heart faithfully examining itself before it ventures to be tried by the test of surrendering all that it best loves at the call of its God.

We shall inquire:—

I. Was it wrong to vow?

By a vow in such a case as that before us is meant, *a solemn promise made to God, that, in consideration of some great deliverance granted by Him, the petitioner would acknowledge that the glory of the deliverance was His, and that out of deep gratitude, he would consecrate himself afresh to the love and service of God.* It is making a free-will offering of one's self to God, in a formal and solemn manner. It was customary that all offerings presented to God should be laid on the altar, and the burnt offering implied complete consecration. This was the form in which Jephthah meant to express his vow.

Such being the general meaning, how could it be wrong for Jephthah to vow? Some regard it as a mere bribe offered to God to secure His help in a great difficulty; others say, it looks like bargaining with God for His aid, and has a heathenish savour about it. We do not see much force in these objections. Is it not right to express gratitude to God for great deliverances wrought? If so, is it not right to express that gratitude by a fuller consecration of one's self to Him in future, than has been the case in times past? And if this is right after the deliverance has been accomplished, how can it be wrong to promise the same thing beforehand, in the event of deliverance being granted? True, we should always be fully devoted to God, but when a new and special mercy occurs, is not that a good reason for a new and special self-dedication? By deliverance from an imminent danger our life is virtually given to us anew, and so furnishes a new reason for the consecration of our lives to His service. It amounts to giving new pledges of our lives to His service. It amounts to giving new pledges of our love and obedience.

The heathens did indeed vow. The mariners who were in the ship with Jonah, in their terror, made vows as well as offered sacrifices (Jonah i 16). An eminent Greek vowed to Minerva, on the occasion of Greece being invaded by Darius, that if she would grant to his country the victory, he would sacrifice on her altars as many he-goats, as would equal the number slain in the camp of the enemy. It was a common thing among the Romans to vow that, if the Divinity complied with the request of the offerer, he would do some signal service out of gratitude.

But it is to little purpose to know what were the customs of the heathen. It is sufficient for our guidance, that God has always approved of vows when rightly made, and has accepted them. He even lays down rules to guide us as to the manner in which they should be made. This puts the matter beyond dispute (Num. xxx. 1-16; vi. 1-12; Lev. xxvii; Deut. xxiii. 21-23; Eccl v. 4). We have also several instances of pious people recorded, who vowed to the Lord in special circumstances, and were accepted. *Jacob* did so (Gen. xxviii. 20), *Hannah*, (I Sam. i. 11), *David* frequently (Ps. lxi. 3, lxvi. 13, cxvi. 16, &c.)

The mere fact of making a vow in itself is not wrong, provided it is made in the manner God requires. It is indeed an act of deep piety.

II. What did Jephthah mean by his vow?

He seems to have had one great *object* in view. *He wished to save precious*

interests which were put in great peril. It was an eventful crisis in Israel's history. The good of the whole nation was involved in the decision which now trembled in the balance. Everything was on the point of being won or lost; should Ammon prevail, a long dark night of sorrow must inevitably overspread the land. Should victory be declared for Israel, the heavy incubus of years of oppression would be lifted up, and a joyful morning of liberty would dawn on the homes of the chosen people. The question was one of life or death to Israel, which really meant the rising or falling of the church of God. Was so sacred a thing as a vow of self-dedication to the Lord too solemn for such an occasion?

By making this vow he meant two things :—

1. *He wished to ascribe all the glory of the salvation of Israel to the Lord.* He knew there would be great rejoicings among the people, and that they would be ready to hail the victory with loud acclamations. There would be gifts and garlands, and dances; voices of song, and the sounding of timbrels. Jephthah will be celebrated and praised, and his name will go down in the lists of Israel's mighty warriors. So now, he will at the outset take a decisive step to secure all the honour to Him to whom it was due. He presents himself and all that he has at the feet of Jehovah. And as a proof of this, he will lay on the altar the first object that presents itself on his return home. That object shall, like the first sheaf representing the whole harvest, stand for the whole property which God has given him, and indicate that all belongs to God. But his meaning went beyond this. He confessed that it was impossible to succeed without the help of his God—that "salvation belonged unto Him," that only through Him "could they do valiantly," and therefore that "their expectation was only from Him."

2. *He wished to put a new seal on his obedience.* It is obvious that we can give nothing to God to enrich Him. All that we have is already His. "Of thine own have we given thee," said the man who spake in name of the congregation that made the largest contribution ever laid on the altar for sacred purposes in the history of time (I. Chron. xxiv. 14–16). We cannot add to God's possessions by what we give (Job xxii. 2). Our gratitude therefore must find another mode of expression; and that which the heart itself instinctively suggests is *deeper love and more implicit obedience.* We understand Jephthah accordingly by laying an offering on the altar to mean that he bound himself to love his God more fully than ever he had done before, and in proof of that, to give Him a more faithful and conscientious obedience.

Thus far all appears to be not only right in itself, but most favourable as to the judgment we are to form of Jephthah's character.

III. The choice of an offering left with God.

This is a critical part of the case, where care is needed to hold the balance even. The terms of his vow have been unduly subjected to a harsh criticism. Reference is made to the rude and barbarous age in which he lived, as an apology for him. He is spoken of as a half savage chief, or a bandit leader in a heathen country. He is supposed to partake somewhat of the fierce character of a robber chieftain, or an Indian warrior, from his long sojourn in a country where there was no fear of God, and where human life was cheap. He is also imagined to have lost the knowledge of the laws and institutions that were given by Israel's God, and to be swayed more by heathen practices than by Divine precept. And, accordingly, he is credited with thinking of a human sacrifice to be laid on the altar, equally with an animal offering, should God

so determine. And some go the length of saying, that he seems prepared to sacrifice his own daughter, if she were the object whom Providence might put in his way.

Nothing, we believe, of all that line of thought ever entered the mind of Jephthah—a man that lived continually in the presence of his God. Such evil suppositions arise from putting too hard an interpretation on the words he uttered when making his vow. We have already said on ver. 31, that he had no well-defined conception before his mind as to what the object might be. We must make allowance for the overwhelming sense of responsibility that rested on him, while he was ordering his words, and, at the least, hold it probable that his thoughts never went the length of imagining that a human victim might be presented to him. Such a victim for a sacrificial offering had never been known in all Israel's history; if we except the abnormal case of Abraham being called to offer up his son—an offering, however, which was never made. Neither we believe had Jephthah ever dreamt of such a thing in all his past life. It would, therefore, never occur to him to draw a sharp distinction between a human and an animal sacrifice, in the language which he used. All his thoughts seemed to be swallowed up by the purpose to offer any object that God Himself might choose; and so he uses the widest latitude of expression, "*whatsoever* cometh forth." He has too much too think of to define his meaning to be, either HE who cometh forth, or THAT which cometh forth. He knew that a human sacrifice was condemned by the law of his God, and therefore never could have supposed, when the choice was left by him to God Himself, that He would choose such a sacrifice as that. How could He choose that, which instead of being pleasing was an abomination in his sight? If Jephthah thought of the matter at all, that must have been his thought.

Yet there was an error committed in the way he took to make choice of an offering. He was in fact both right and wrong. (1.) *He was right in his motive.* His heart was full of desire to give all the glory to the God of Israel, and it seemed to him a more complete surrender of himself to God, if he should make God Himself the judge of the kind of offering he should make. He felt assured that he could make no improper choice, and that the best thing that he could do was to leave himself entirely in His hands. (2.) *He was wrong in not counting the cost.* He did not consider that a vow once made must be carried out; for it was equivalent to a solemn assertion made in the presence of God, with the lifting up of the hands, and calling God to witness. It was, therefore culpably irreverent to promise anything in this manner, which had not been carefully weighed. No speaking at random is allowed before the Divine footstool (Eccl. v. 2; Lev. x. 3). It was well for him to say to his God, "I place all that I have before Thee—choose what Thou pleasest, and I shall give it up at once. I solemnly engage to keep my word." But it was wrong to go that length, before he had carefully examined, whether his heart was prepared to give up its dearest object, at the call of his God. It was a similar rashness that induced Peter to say to his Master: "If it be Thou, bid me come to Thee on the water." He soon began to sink, and so did Jephthah. The rule laid down by Christ Himself is, "If any man come to me and hate not father and mother, wife and children, brethren and sisters, yea and his own life, he cannot be my disciple." Similarly, He says, "He that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." It was trifling with God for Jephthah solemnly to profess to do that at His call, which he had never settled it with his heart to do.

As Jephthah puts it there was no reservation. Anything which he had in the world God might choose, and he would yield it up. This was true piety, but it was a terrible risk for a human heart that did not know its own weakness.

IV. The choice being left with God, He chooses the best.

Everything that happens is of God's ordering. It was He who arranged in His Providence that Jephthah's daughter should be the object to go forth to meet him on his return, instead of any member of his flocks or herds. A solemn promise had been made, as the price of a great deliverance asked, and God virtually says, "I have given you all you asked—the salvation of the whole people of Israel; now, therefore, I ask that you give me your daughter in return." This was an overwhelming surprise, and most harrowing to a father's feelings. Yet by two considerations it is justified. It was simply deciding according to Jephthah's own terms, which kept back nothing, but permitted anything even the best, to be taken. Also, when the choice was left open, it was right that the best should be given to God. This was simply His due. It would have been wrong for Jephthah to have said that he loved the creature better than his God. It was reasonable to give up to God the most precious jewel he had; for all that he had, his daughter included, had been given him by God.

V. The selection is made to test Jephthah's character.

This is proved by the simple fact, that a human sacrifice could not be acceptable to Jehovah. It was condemned as one of the worst iniquities of the nations, that were driven out of Canaan, because of their enormous wickedness (Deut. xii. 29-31; Lev. xx. 2, 3; Deut. xviii. 10, 12). Such a thing as a human sacrifice, is expressly declared to be an abomination to the Lord, nor was such a thing ever heard of in Israel, until the times of Ahaz and Manasseh, not even in Jezebel's time. We cannot therefore for a moment suppose, that God would now take delight in seeing any human sacrifice from Jephthah's house laid on the altar as a burnt offering before Him. It must have been with another intention that He put his daughter in the way. He meant, we believe, to put Jephthah to the test, whether, when now he had put himself entirely in God's hand, he would yield up his very best to his God, without a murmur when called upon to do so.

There is only one other instance in the whole of Israelitish history where a human victim was laid on the altar for immolation by God's command, and that, we are expressly told, was to test the character, or try the faith and obedience of the offerer (Gen. xxii. 1, 2). But to show that actual immolation was not intended, we are informed that, at the extreme moment, Abraham was kept back from slaying his son, by the appearance of an angel from Jehovah, charging him not to proceed farther, for the purpose of the command was gained by his showing his willingness to comply with it (Gen. xxii. 10, &c.). In like manner, an opportunity is afforded to Jephthah here, to show whether he was willing to sacrifice the dearest object he had on earth at the call of his God. Could he say, "There is none on earth I desire besides thee"? Having shown his willingness to go this length, and not even to withhold his only daughter from his God, the purpose was served, and, we believe, the actual burning on the altar was not permitted. If he had gone farther, it would have been a complete solecism in the entire history of God's people. There is nothing to justify it on any side, but much to condemn such an act. It is against the whole spirit of the divine law, which treats human life as sacred, and which, as we have said, condemns human sacrifices as among the most atrocious crimes of the heathen nations. Looked at in itself, indeed, it is difficult to distinguish it from the act of murder, taking the life of a fellow creature, and that, not only without asking her consent, but it was for a father to imbrue his hands in the blood of his own daughter, whose life he was bound by the strongest obligations to preserve! What pleasure could God take in such an offering

where so many of His laws were violated?—the law of parental love, the duty of parental protection, the great moral commandment "Thou shalt not kill," and the peremptory prohibition of human sacrifices.

VI. The vow was fulfilled in the spirit, not in the letter.

This is not expressly said. But the account is manifestly elliptical; for it is not said that Jephthah informed his daughter what his vow actually was. Yet it is obvious, that he must have informed her, for her whole action implied that she knew. In like manner we are not told, that the letter of his vow was exchanged for the spirit, though that seems to be the only possible way in which it could have been acceptable unto God. The very fact, that to lay a human victim on the altar as a burnt offering to God, is so entirely opposed to divine requirement, as well as to Israelitish practice, ought of itself to be sufficient, without any express statement, to make us believe that the vow could not be carried out in the letter. It is indeed alleged, that his vow required him to put his daughter to death in the manner which is done to a victim laid on the altar. For did he not solemnly vow, that the object who might meet him from the doors of his house on his return "would surely be the Lord's, and he would offer it up for a burnt offering"? Also in ver. 39 is it not expressly said, that "he did with her according to his vow which he had vowed"? Many think these statements conclusively prove, that she was offered on the altar for a burnt offering. In this opinion we cannot acquiesce, for these reasons:—

(1.) *The idea of a human sacrifice was not in his mind when he made the vow.* It is clear from his intense surprise, and overwhelming grief, that the thought of his daughter being the victim never entered his mind. It was also matter of fact, that the laying of a human victim on the altar was unknown in the history of God's people. In Jephthah's conceptions, it was taken for granted, that the victim would be an animal. He knew of no other in the past, and could never imagine anything else now. Had he thought of the possibility of a human victim, it is not likely he would have spoken of offering it as a burnt offering, contrary to all experience, and in face of the fact, that such an offering was as abomination to God (Jer. vii. 30, 31; Deut. xii. 30–32). He might be wrong, and we think he was wrong in expressing himself indefinitely, so that the language would apply to any object, whether human or animal. But we believe he thought only of such an object as could properly be laid on the altar. The meaning he attached to his vow we apprehend was this:—"The object that comes to meet me on my return, if it be suitable for laying on the altar, I will offer it for a burnt offering."

(2.) *No vow could make that well pleasing to God which was already sinful.* The obligation is indeed strong to pay that which we have vowed (Eccl. v. 4, 5). But that applies only to things which are lawful. Beyond that limit, the rule does not hold; for no vow of ours, however solemnly made, can make that which God condemns cease to be a sin. And if it be a sin we dare not commit it by way of fulfilling our vow. To do so would only bring down the Divine frown. God's will is always the highest law, and overrides every other law. Jephthah could not carry out his vow *literally* towards his daughter, without doing a thing which was an abomination to Jehovah. Yet, in so far as it could be done, consistently with what God approved of, he was bound to fulfil it, that is, not in the letter, but in the spirit.

(3.) *The kind of vow which he made did not absolutely require a literal fulfilment.* The Hebrew word used in ver. 30 is not *cherem* but *neder*. The former denoted a devotement to destruction, and was accompanied by an anathema, or

execration. There was no power of redemption from this vow (Lev. xxvii. 28). When it applied to animals, it meant that they were devoted to destruction; or to things, that they were to be utterly consumed with fire, or to be held exclusively reserved for God in their use for all time coming. When it applied to persons, it was usually to the enemies of God, or the heathen, such as the Canaanites, the Amalekites, and all aliens (Deut. xiii. 12–18; 1 Sam. xv. 33; Num. xxi. 2, 3). The *neder* implied a milder vow. It meant simply the bringing of any offering to God, and dedicating it to Him, such as lands, tithes, beasts, both clean and unclean. These might be redeemed at a certain rate. In the case of a female, it was 30 shekels of silver (Lev. xxvii. 4). It is this word which is employed here. *Neder*, indeed, is a generic word, and includes *cherem*, but the very fact that the former word is used and not the latter, leaves room for supposing that there might be a fulfilment in the spirit, apart from the letter of the vow.

(4.) *In fact he did fulfil his vow, but the manner in which he did so is not recorded.* Our A.V. says "he did with her according to the vow which he had vowed." but the original has it, "he did to her the vow which he had vowed." The words "according to" are not in the Hebrew. The averment made there is simply that he accomplished his vow without saying *in what manner*. Looking a little closer, what is the substance of meaning in the phrase, "I will offer it up for a burnt offering?" It is not the mere act of slaying, or burning the victim we are to look at, but at what that implies. Ceremonialism was nothing in itself, but the meaning it expressed was most important. The meaning here in substance is, that the object so offered is entirely and absolutely devoted to God, so that it cannot belong to any one else but Him. All connection is cut off from the world around. If then this substance of meaning expressed by the vow can be fulfilled in some other way on Jephthah's daughter, than by immolation, which would be the breaking of a Divine command, it is natural to expect that that other way would be chosen. And if so, it would still be true that he had kept his word to his God in the only way he lawfully could.

That mode, we believe, was by devoting her to perpetual virginity. This meant directly the cutting her off from the possibility of marriage, and so removing the principal link by which she might be bound to the world. But indirectly, it meant also the removal of all other links by which she might be bound to all other objects, that she might be reserved for God alone. She was thus set apart exclusively for God. A husband, a father, and relatives, were to be as nothing to her, because of the completeness of her consecration to God. To suppose that this was the form which the fulfilment of the vow took, is no mere fancy. For though we are not told it in so many words, in the narrative, neither are we informed that he placed his daughter as a bleeding victim on the altar. On the *mode* of fulfilling the vow, the record is silent, the *fact* that he did fulfil it is explicitly stated. But we are informed that what she bewailed for two months was her "virginity." On this emphasis is put. Why not bewail her impending sacrifice, if sacrificed she was to be. If she were so soon to die, it would be of small consequence to her whether she should die a virgin or not. But if she were bound by a sacred law to a life-long virginity, it would be reckoned to her a perpetual reproach, in view of the stigma put upon it by Israelitish society.

Besides, *when it is related that he fulfiled his vow upon her*, it *follows in the same sentence*, "*and she knew no man*" which naturally means, it was *in this way* that the vow was performed. She was never married "Her life was dedicated to the Lord as a spiritual burnt offering, in life-long chastity."—*(Keil).*

To put the tense into the pluperfect as some do, and say "she *had* known no man is a gratuitous gloss, for which there is no warrant. The whole statement means that he fulfilled his vow through the fact that she knew no man.

Other arguments confirm this interpretation.

(a.) To be given up to a life of perpetual virginity served the purpose equally well with immolation on the altar. It ought to be remembered what the purpose of the sacrifice really was. It was to express the offerer's entire consecration of himself to the Lord. This he would symbolise by bringing forward an animal as a substitute, and offering it as a whole burnt offering in his stead. But when, to his surprise, it was a human victim that was brought to him, he presents her as an object to be separated from the world, and dedicated wholly unto God for the term of her natural life. There could hardly be more complete consecration to the Lord for any daughter of Israel, than to remain unmarried, and without the prospect of maternity, to be shut out from all society, and to lead a life of solitude and seclusion.

(b.) Human beings were to be redeemed, not sacrificed, when presented to God. (Ex. xiii. 12, 13 with 15, xxxiv. 20; Num. xviii. 15.) Jephthah's daughter was his first-born. After the first explosion of grief, it would soon occur to Jephthah himself, as well as to those around him, that the same thing could not be done with a human, as with an animal, offering. But to make good the vow, something must be done to the object that met him at the door of his house on his return. To appoint her to perpetual virginity, and life-long shutting out from the world, would either naturally be suggested to their own minds, or would be dictated by Heaven as a fitting course to take in carrying out the spirit of the vow. She would thereby become dead to the world, and so it would be equivalent to an actual immolation.

(c.) If she were to die, why should she ask to spend two months on the mountains? When she manifestly loved her father so well, and was so thoroughly beloved by him, it seems unnatural for her to ask to be separate from him for two months. We would rather expect that they would both be too anxious to spend the time in each other's society, and think it all too short.

(d.) If she were to die, why seek to the mountains at all? The same tears might have been shed at home. But it was her virginity that she was to bewail. "She was to remain a bud that had not been allowed to unfold itself, being prevented not by death but by life." "Lamentations about her virginity could not be uttered in the town, and in the presence of men. Modesty required the solitudes of the mountains for these. Only in sacred silence does the virtuous heart of the maiden pour out its lamentations of love."—*(Cassel).*

(e.) The act of Jephthah is not disapproved by God, but on the contrary seems to be recorded to his honour. The smaller transgression of Gideon is recorded with an express word of censure (Gen. viii. 27). "Which became a snare to Gideon and his house." Yet here is no word of disapprobation, but on the contrary, the tale ends with a celebration of praise to the daughter of Jephthah for many a long year thereafter. If a human sacrifice had now been offered, why should not the brand of reprobation have been put upon it, as is done everywhere else when it is mentioned in scripture?

(f.) If Jephthah had been guilty of such a scandal, why is he held up as a pattern of faith and an eminently godly man? There can be little doubt that the men in that list were men of God and heirs of salvation, though they had their imperfections and their sins. But the presumption is always against a really good man being deliberately guilty of violating a solemn rule laid down by his God. And Jephthah's name stands in that honoured list (Heb. xi. 32).

(g.) Once more. If sacrifice there was, it is difficult to explain how it could have been performed. Burnt offerings, those cases where the animal was first put to death, and then had its body burned on the altar, could only be lawfully

presented on the altar at the tabernacle, or before the ark by the priests, unless when some extraordinary occurrence in Providence had taken place, which did not apply here. But could any priest of the whole number be found, with boldness enough, to commit such an offence against the jealous God of Israel, as to immolate a human being on the altar? And Jephthah was no priest, so that he could not officiate in doing such a work himself. Shiloh, where the tabernacle was, was in the tribe of Ephraim, a part of the land whither Jephthah was not very likely to go, when the feeling was so hostile between him and the men of that tribe. "If then, there is the best reason to believe that such an offering was not made by the high priest, nor by any priest—that it was not made by Jephthah himself, and that it was not made at Shiloh, the appointed place of sacrifice, what reason is there to suppose it was made at all?"—*(Bush)*.

Practical Lessons.

(Vers. 30, 31, 34–40).

I. It is possible for the highest religious principle to exist, with irreligion in its worst forms all around it.

Jephthah's character is the proof. Who can doubt the sterling principle of the man who, at the first overwhelming revelation of the price he would have to pay for fidelity to his God, nobly said, "I will rather sacrifice the dearest object I have on earth than take back my word to my God." Not that he loved his daughter less than human instinct prompts, but that he loved his God more. Yet he lived for many years beyond the confines of Israel, with no fearers of the true God around him, no worship of the God of Israel observed, but His laws transgressed, and other gods served instead! This was worse than even the position of David, who lived for a shorter time an outcast from his people, and was not so entirely an outcast, being often within the boundary of the sacred land, and having some partial access to its privileges. Yet Jephthah was full of the law of his God, if we may judge from this chapter, had the fear of God constantly before his eyes, and made no great decision in life without His approbation.

The Divine promise was fulfilled to him, "I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest," not only from temporal dangers, but from spiritual contamination. Jesus himself living in a world of sin knew no sin, and He is able to make any one of those who accept Him as their Redeemer, to live a "holy and harmless" life, "*separate from sinners.*" Temptations when firmly resisted tend to strengthen the character. Greater resolution is required in adhering to one's principles. When a man has to battle with a fierce wind as he proceeds on his course, the more he sets his face to contend with it, his muscles, his nerves, and his whole constitution become strengthened. Wherever we are, we may always live near to God.

II. The human will never bends to the Divine will at a loss.

This is illustrated by the case of both father and daughter. In both, we see straightforwardness and decision of character, and when what seems like a towering rock rising up in their path, neither of them thinks on that account of "going back." They will sacrifice every thing for their God—the father, his dearest treasure on earth; the daughter, her whole interest in life. Each bows to the Divine will; and are they the losers? Of much of earthly comfort and pleasure they may be, and were really, deprived, but that was far more

than made up by inward peace with God during life, a high reputation for loyalty to their God in future ages, and a true immortality of fame beyond death and the grave. They lose the lesser joys of time, the indulgences of the body, but they gain a high moral fame in the estimation of all the holy and good to the end of time. In the world to come the gain is unspeakably glorious. The highest piety of the creature is to have no other will but that of its God. That will, will never disappoint in the long run, even where great sufferings intervene (Rom. viii. 18; John xiv. 27; xvi. 33; I. Peter i. 6–7). It is a Christ-like spirit that can say, with a bitter cup in the hand, "Not my will, but thine be done!"

III. It is oftentimes love that dictates our severest trials.

Why not say always? "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth" is one of the familiar Christian experiences that go without saying. Jephthah's daughter shone out all at once as a star of the first magnitude, just the moment before it seemed to become extinguished. But it is one of those lights that never can be extinguished. It has shone for 3,000 years and it shines still, nor will it cease to shine so long as high moral virtue and spiritual beauty in the sight of Heaven, continue to be admired. But, before her great trial, this beauty of character was unknown. It was the great sacrifice she was called on to make that made her famous, because she rose with the occasion. She was like those who were unknown—

"Till persecution dragged them into fame
And chased them up to heaven."

If we, by the grace of God, but do the same, we shall find that our mountain waves of trouble are the very things that raise us nearer to heaven. To all eternity will the afflicted Christian, who has profited by his affliction, have reason to bless God that He sent the affliction, because of the immense accession it brings to his spirituality of mind, and heavenliness of character.

IV. The closest ties of the earthly state are often suddenly ruptured without notice given.

The father in this case never intended for a moment to create the risk of losing his daughter by the vow he made, nor did he imagine it could by possibility have any such effect. Yet this separation came all in a moment, nor could it be avoided. Many parents strive hard to build up bright prospects for their children. They spend a fortune to get them well fed and well clad, to make their home comfortable, to supply them with all the conditions of good health, to get them well married and hopefully started in life, and to do all that can be done beyond themselves to advance their health and happiness. Yet, at any moment, God has a thousand means before him for breaking the brittle thread of life, were He so minded. The truest wisdom, therefore, is for father and daughter, and all members of family circles, to strive to become one in the Lord Christ. That tie once formed nothing can break. And when sudden rupture is made of other ties, that link of connection will only come out firmer than before, and prove that the union is still stronger on the other side of death than now, and will last for ever.

V. Works of righteousness are always satisfactory in the retrospect.

They are always fresh and green, because possessed of moral or spiritual excellence in themselves, and they are always accompanied by peace of conscience. "They make us not ashamed." We can look back on them for

ever, and never regret having done such works. All our regrets will be, that we did not strive more earnestly for that strength from on high, through which such works can be done. They are works that bear the light of day, which no one made after the image of God shall ever regret to have done. They will always have the smile of heaven upon them.

VI. Vows should first be settled with the heart, before they are brought out in form.

It ought never to be forgotten that we have to deal with a heart-searching God, and that every service rendered to Him, in order to be acceptable, should arise from a well-considered purpose of the heart. Vows are the free-will offerings of the heart unto God, prompted by a consideration generally of some special act of His goodness. In them the soul steps forward, and solemnly pledges itself to a greater degree of loyalty and obedience to its God. This to be acceptable implies great reverence before God. It is no time for trifling, or incoherent speech. The heart ought to weigh well with itself, whether it is prepared to make this valuable offering, or perform that important service, before it come forward in due form to enter into a special engagement.

"Just prior to the issue of the September proclamation of liberty to the slaves in the United States, the President opened the business of the Cabinet-meeting by saying, that the time for announcing the emancipation policy could be no longer delayed. Public sentiment would sustain it, many warm supporters demanded it, and (speaking in a low tone) I have promised my God that I will do it. On being asked by Mr. Chase, whether he correctly understood him, 'Yes,' he replied, 'I have made a solemn vow before God, that if General Lee were driven back from Pennsylvania, I would crown the result by the declaration of freedom to the slaves.' He issued his proclamation, and four million slaves became free men."—*Chase.*

"Vows are easily made, but more easily broken. A sea captain, while resting on a single plank in the wide ocean, vowed to devote his life to God if he should be saved, but he forgot his vow as soon as his feet were on the solid earth. If a child is sick, his ungodly father may vow amendment of life, and attention to the word of God, on condition that the son recovers. Sometimes real conversion follows, but more frequently the person soon returns like the sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire."

"The Archbishop of Cologne, being asked by the Emperor Sigismund how to reach true happiness, replied, 'Perform when thou art well what thou didst promise when thou wast sick.'"

CHAPTER XII.

THE ARROGANT EPHRAIMITES AND JEPHTHAH—THE JUDGES WITHOUT FAME.

(Verses 1–15.)

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. Gathered themselves together.] Not in a disorderly or tumultuous manner as some would take it, but *assembled in force*, for the purpose of fighting if necessary (ch. vii. 23, 24; x. 17). *Passed over* (Jordan) *northward*, or it may mean to *Zaphon*, for such is the Hebrew word. Zaphon was a town in the tribe of Gad, mentioned along with Succoth.

Wherefore, etc., didst thou not call us to go with thee?] This was nothing but the old haughty and jealous spirit of the most ambitious of the tribes, which was constantly reappearing when the honours seemed to be going in the direction of others. We see it in Joshua's days at the division of the land (Josh. xvii. 14-18), we see it in the days of Gideon (Jud. viii. 1-3), and we see it now. **We will burn thine house on thee with fire.]** Such was the depth of their hatred. This was not uncommon in that rough age (ch. xiv. 15; xv. 6; Josh vii. 25; Gen. xxxviii. 24; Josh. viii. 8, 19; Jud. i. 8).

2. When I called you, ye delivered me not, etc.] This is not told before, probably because they met the request with a point-blank refusal. They would refuse to fight under the leadership of a man like Jephthah, who had not the pure blood of an Israelite. Though God had acknowledged him, they would not. Also they felt that the danger was very serious, and so they kept within their own borders (Ps. lxxviii. 9-11). **Put my life in my hands]** a phrase meaning, I risked my life, and you did not assist me (1 Sam. xix. 5; Job xiii. 14; Ps. cxix. 109). This was the wolf and the lamb policy on the part of the Ephraimites, but they found Jephthah a rough lamb to deal with. His language, however, is not defiant. He would willingly have taken their help, but when they did not give it, he sought the special help of his God, and that was not refused.

3. Wherefore then are ye come up to fight against me?] Since God Himself has succoured me, why do you come to fight with me? Why not rather be grateful that the whole land is rid of the dark shadow of the oppressor? There was nothing here to give just cause of offence, and if the issue was tragic, compared with the parallel case of Gideon's dealings with them, the circumstances were very different. Thus in Gideon's days, the Ephraimites had really done much to gain the large success of the occasion, but here they had done nothing. Gideon had good reason to thank them for the share they had in the defeat of the common enemy; Jephthah had not a word to say of any good they had done, because they really had done nothing. Gideon, though called to task for overlooking these proud people, was not threatened with anything against his personal safety, but against Jephthah they came up in force, and vowing the direst vengeance. They would indeed not wait for any explanation. The attack began on their side.

4. The men of Gilead smote Ephraim, etc.] It would seem as if the feeling of resentment in this case were cherished more by "the men of Gilead," than by Jephthah himself, For what was done is put chiefly in their name, both in verse 4 and verse 5. Jephthah led them in self-defence but did not instigate them. The supercilious contempt with which the Ephraimites looked down upon the Gileadites, and their disdaining to acknowledge Jephthah's leadership, notwithstanding his victorious closing of the war, was keenly felt by the Gileadites. It was a sting to their tribal character, and led to a spirit of bitter retaliation. They thirsted for an opportunity of taking revenge.

Ye are fugitives of Ephraim, etc.] This statement is not very clear as it stands; but the meaning seems to be—Ye are the scum of Ephraim, and counted as such both among the common Ephraimites and Manassites—a bad lot, who have no position as good citizens, but are nondescripts. The Gileadites, in fact, were not a tribe, but the descendants of a powerful family in Manasseh. But both Manasseh and Ephraim were the children of Joseph, and so there ought to have been a family kindred feeling. Instead of this, there was nothing but jealousy and desire for superiority on the side of Ephraim, because of the greater blessing which the patriarch Jacob bestowed on his younger grandson (Gen. xlviii. 17-19). Presuming on this advantageous position, which their ancestor left them in legacy, the men of Ephraim claimed to represent the whole of the children of Joseph, that is—Ephraim proper and all Manasseh, thus including the men of Gilead as well. They regarded themselves as the people of high caste, the Manassites as a sort of plebeians, and the Gileadites as nothing better than pariahs. In the collective mass of the children of Joseph, the Gileadites were regarded by these men of pride as menials or cads, because they were properly not a community at all, but only a "set of fugitives," and yet they presumed to hold up their heads as if they were a tribe. Hence they were goaded on to be resentful.

5. Took the passages of Jordan.] They lived on both sides of the river, though chiefly on the east side (see Num. xxvi. 29, 30, etc.). They seemed to be better acquainted with the crossings than the Ephraimites; and they were in no mood to give quarter, for they were high-spirited, and could not bear the taunts that were flung at them.

6. Say now Shibboleth, etc.] How greatly is the pride of the Ephraimites humbled, that now they are glad to renounce the tribal connection, and to say they are not Ephraimites, to save their lives! This too was said to Gileadites! But the dissemblers were discovered. "The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips." The sound of *sh* seems to have been common among the dialects spoken to the east of Jordan, but it had not yet got a place in the spoken language of the Ephraimite. By his inability to pronounce this sound an Ephraimite was

easily discovered. In the day of reckoning, what a variety of witnesses can God bring against a guilty man! They lie on all sides. Every stone, every straw, the very winds of heaven, or the clods of the dust (Job xx. 27; xviii. 8-10).

In different communities among the same people, nothing is more common than to hear different dialects spoken. The guttural sound of the letters *ch* as known and pronounced in Scotland is impossible of pronunciation by an Englishman, as in the words Ecclefechan or Auchtermuchty. Again, the letter *r*, as in *river* cannot be pronounced by a native of Northumberland. The sound of *th* cannot be given by many foreigners, though quite easy of utterance to the English-speaking race. Many German Jews pronounce the Hebrew word *Beth* as *Baiss*, and *Bereshith* they pronounce as *Beresiss* or *Bereshiss*. Peter, as a Galilean, often brought in his broad inelegant phrases which grated on refined ears, so that bystanders knew him to be a Galilean from his tongue. "Thy speech bewrayeth thee" (Mark xiv. 70). So is the Arabic tongue different as spoken in Aleppo, in Cairo, and in Bagdad. The word Shibboleth itself means "a stream," or sometimes "ear." But the sole reference here, is to the pronunciation of the first combination of letters in the word. When, during the Flemish war, the insurrection against the French broke out (1302), the gates were guarded, and no one was suffered to pass out except those who were able to say, "*Scitt ende friend*," which words no Frenchmen could pronounce.—(*Cassel.*)

There fell of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.] Certain numbers had a special significance among the Israelites. Forty-two mockers of the prophet Elisha were torn to pieces by the bears (2 Kings ii. 24); when God's judgments descend on Ahab's house, 42 brethren of Ahaziah are put to death by Jehu (2 Kings x. 14).

7. He was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.] God takes care of His own—even "their dust is precious." Jephthah has been harshly judged by many. But it is manifest that God makes much of him, according to His own rule. "Them that honour me I will honour." How small a matter to be judged—rather misjudged of man! "He that judgeth us is the Lord."

In his city.] So the Sept. reads. It uses ו for ר. In that case Mizpah would be the place where he was laid, for it was the city of Jephthah.

8. Ibzan of Bethlehem.] Some think this was the same with Boaz, for it seems to have been in Judah. The thought was common among the Jews, yet it rests purely on supposition. The reference is rather to a town in Zebulun.

9-15. The lives of the three judges mentioned here were short and uneventful. All that is said of them is that they lived a little while, they passed across the stage, and then disappeared. Two of them had large families, but no names are given, and nothing is recorded as to what they did. It is said of Abdon's sons and nephews, or rather grandsons, that they rode on ass colts, which in those days implied wealth and high station alike (Ch. v. 10; x. 4).

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS ON CHAPTER XII.

I. It is impossible to satisfy the cravings of pride and envy.

They are like the daughters of the horse-leach that continually cry, Give, give. Nothing would please these Ephraimites. Jephthah offered at the outset to give them a large share of the honours of the fight, but then they kept in the background; for it was by no means certain whether they should overcome or be overcome, and now when the battle is over and won, they turn round and murmur because they were not called (comp. Matt. xi. 16-19). *See remarks on chap. viii. 1-3.*

II. Deadly results flow from a malicious use of the tongue.

Malicious words sting a man usually in his character, that is, in "the apple of his eye." For nothing about him is so sensitive as his character. Hence the consequences are often most destructive (James iii. 2-8). *You are the refuse of Ephraim, worthless as the rubbish under our feet.* Such was the taunt of the imperial tribe towards the poor Gileadites, who, however, could as keenly resent a barbed arrow thrown at them by the tongue as any other class. Their rage became a frenzy, and, those who had so thoughtlessly flung the shaft of reproach,

little reflected on the terrible rebound their evil words would produce. "There fell at that time of Ephraimites 42,000 men." Some would indeed reduce the number to 2,040 men. But the A.V. is most generally taken as correct. "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth!"

There is no limit to the ruinous effect of an evil tongue. "It is the instrument of all strife and contention, the inventor of law suits, and the origin of wars. It is the origin of error, of lies, of calumny, and of blasphemies." [*Æsop*]. A large manufactory is burnt down to the ground, notwithstanding that many engines are employed to pour water upon it. That fire is kindled by a rushlight. A splendid farmyard, with hay ricks, corn stacks, stables, and other buildings, is reduced to blackened ruins by a destructive fire: and that is the doing of a lucifer match! "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." What need to offer the prayer, "Set a watch, Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

III. Sinful passions, long-cherished, will in the end bring dire punishment.

The same pride and envy, superciliousness of manner, and arrogance of spirit, with resentfulness of feeling, which were shown on this occasion, were exhibited many years before to Gideon. During all those years such dispositions were cherished by the Ephraimites, and though the Ruler in Providence permitted them long to pass with impunity, the time came round at last for these wicked to receive the due reward of their iniquities (II. Peter, ii. 3; Prov. xxix. 1). The long delay to bring punishment, means that "God's goodness would lead men to repentance."

IV. The Redeemer cares for the bodies as well as the souls of those whom He redeems.

The very burial place of the good man is worth mentioning. His dust is precious, however great may be the humiliation of the grave. His grave is known to Him by whom he is redeemed; and, when the time comes for the gathering up of the jewels, there will be no difficulty in finding out the spot where every jewel is to be found. "This is the Father's will, that of all which He hath given me, I should lose nothing, but raise it up again at the last day." "—We wait for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body." Every part of the man must be redeemed, for it is for the honour of Him whose the work is, that it should be done with perfection. As Moses said to Pharaoh, "not a hoof shall be left behind," so will a greater than Moses, who is the author of a greater redemption require from Death, that he yield up all the parts and fragments of the "vile body," so that not a limb shall be left in the grave. All now sleep under the eye of Jesus, and the moment is advancing when at His Almighty whisper, all that has been so long in the dark charnel-house held bound in the sleep of death, shall awake singing, each one rising on the wing like the lark, but with sweeter song, to meet their Lord in the air, and surround his throne with adorations and praises as their never-ceasing employment.

CHAPTER XIII

New Oppressors and a New Deliverer

In fixing the date at which Samson appeared, it must be remembered that great diversity of opinion exists, as to the exact chronology of the whole period between the exodus from Egypt, and the building of Solomon's temple. The entire duration of that period, we are informed in I. Kings vi. 1, was spanned by 480 years. But how to allot the various sections, into which it was divided, forms a puzzling problem. Upwards of 50 different calculations have been made, and most of them differ widely from each other, some reducing the lapse of time during the Judges to 170 or 190 years [*Ewald* and *Bertheau*], whilst others lengthen it out to over 600 years [*Josephus.*]

Without entering into this entangling discussion, it may suffice to remark, that the narrative in this book, in the opinion of several of the best authorities, such as *Keil, Backmann, Vitringa, Cassel, Lightfoot*, &c., gives the events as they followed each other *in succession*, up to the death of Jair, which, counting from the invasion of Chusan, the first oppressor, extended over a period of 300 years. After that date most of the events related seem to have been more or less *synchronous*. Thus the oppression by the Philistines, and that by the Ammonites, are spoken of as occurring together, the one on the east, chiefly affecting the tribes beyond Jordan, and the other on the west, affecting Judah and Benjamin, Simeon and Dan. (ch. x. 7.) These were not quite simultaneous; the one preceded the other by some years, or may have been over when the other began. First, an account is given of the Ammonite oppression, and the deliverance accomplished under Jephthah, and now, in what follows, an account is given of the yoke imposed by the Philistines, on the tribes that were nearest to them, and the deliverances wrought by the mighty Samson on their behalf.

Part of the time of Eli's high priesthood must have been coeval with the deeds of Samson. It is scarcely any objection to say, that we hear nothing of him in the account given of Israel's great hero. For, indeed, we hear little or nothing of the priesthood, or of sanctuary service, all through this book. The purpose in it is chiefly, to give an account of the manner in which the people by their conduct kept their covenant towards their God, and how He, in turn, kept his covenant engagements to them. From first to last they were uniformly treacherous towards Him, while He was uniformly faithful and gracious towards them. We are now, therefore, at a time when the people had been already for some time oppressed by the Ammonites beyond Jordan, and when, on this side Jordan, the oppression by the Philistines was just beginning to be most severely felt, while to the north, the tribes were enjoying a season of comparative quietude, under the administration of wise and righteous judges.

Verses 1–25.

Critical Notes.—1. Did evil again] or continued to do evil (Jer. xvii. 9; Heb. iii. 12; Gen. vi. 5; Jer. xiii. 23). See on Ch. iii. 12; iv. 1; vi. 1, etc. Into the hand of the Philistines.] The land of the Philistines (Ex. xiii. 17) was on the coast of the Mediterranean, between Joppa and the border of Egypt, to north and south, and between the mountains of Judah and the sea, to east and west. This was one of the most fertile plains in all Palestine; it grew richer crops, and supported a larger population than any other. The people were brave and warlike, and at their hands the Israelites suffered longer and more severely, than at those of any other of the heathen nations. We first hear of them before the confusion of tongues at Babel (Gen. x. 14), where Philistim and Caphtorim are spoken of as grandsons of Ham, the son of

Noah. Caphtor, according to Jewish tradition, was Cappadocia. The people settled first in Crete, which is also called Caphtor, and afterwards they went to Palestine. Allusions are made to them in Amos ix. 7 ; Zech. ix. 5-7 ; Jer. xlvii. 4 ; Deut. ii. 23. It is more probable, that they belonged to the Pali, or shepherd race, called by different names—the Pali, Pelasgi, Palatines, Philistines. There seem to have been different immigrations of them into Palestine. First, that of the Casluhim (Gen. x. 14). Next, the Caphtorim, a kindred clan, about the time of the Exodus. The place where they settled was called "the sea of the Philistines." Thirdly, the Cherethites, not mentioned till the time of Saul, who are spoken of at that time as a Philistine clan, enjoying territory and wealth (see Ex. xxiii. 31 ; xiii. 17 ; 1 Sam. xxx. 14, 16). About 300 years before the time of Samson they lost three of their great cities to Israel, but by his time they had received a great accession of power and had recovered them again (Jud. i. 18). The Philistines thus consisted of different tribes, who came together in the south-west of Palestine at different times, and took a name suggested by their habits and history, signifying "emigrants," or "strangers"—just as Saxons, Danes, and Normans, immigrating into our own island at different epochs, became at length amalgamated and united under the one name of English. This mixture of blood tended in both cases, no doubt, to give a character of greater vigour, enterprise, and general superiority.

2. Of Zorah.] A town at first belonging to Judah, but afterwards given to Dan (Josh. xix. 41), on the western slope of the mountains of Judah, near to Eshtaol (Josh. xv. 33). His wife was barren.] But for a special design to serve, Samson had never been brought into existence. It was the same with the whole nation of Israel. "The Lord had need of them," otherwise such a nation had never been. They were brought into existence contrary to nature. The family of the Danites.] *Mishpachath Dani* is used in the same meaning as *Shebet Dani*, the tribe of the Danites, for at the numbering of the people there was only one family of the Danites, who, however, multiplied greatly (Num. xxvi. 42, 43).

3. The angel of the Lord.] This name usually, if not always, in the Old Testament, applies to "the Angel—Jehovah,"—the uncreated Angel, or the form in which Christ appeared to His people in Old Testament times. Thou shalt bear a son.] God "raised up" Ehud and Othniel, called Barak through Deborah, and called Gideon direct. Now Samson is chosen before he is born. The angel comes to his mother. God is not confined to one mode of action. It is something to know, in view of the strange character which Samson exhibited when he came to man's estate, that God thought of him when as yet he was not, and specially raised him up to do His work. Compare the special messages sent to the parents of those who were raised up to be blessings to the Church and to society, to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. xvii. 19 ; xviii. 10, 14), to Hannah (1 Sam. i. 17), to Elizabeth (Luke i. 13), and to Mary (Luke i. 31).

5. The child shall be a Nazarite unto God.] Not Nazar, but Nazirite. *One separated to God* or specially dedicated, according to certain external observances, namely, to drink no wine or strong drink, to eat no unclean thing, and let no razor come on his head, also not to touch a dead body, or attend a funeral (Num. vi. 1-8, &c.) Some interpret these signs to indicate, self-denial, *holiness, and* humility, or submission. The first two of these interpretations may be included, but the general idea, is that of entire consecration to God for a special purpose. The forbidding of wine, is not so much here a prohibition of self-indulgence, as a restriction of that which would produce ceremonial uncleanness (Lev. x. 9). Hence it was forbidden to the priests, while doing duty in the tabernacle. The priest had an office and functions which did not belong to the Nazarite, but their absolute consecration to God was practically the same. The latter, was always to look on himself as if he were in the Sanctuary, holy in himself as all things around him were, and all his duties holy duties. "The Nazir is indeed a walking altar of God ; and his flowing hair is the visible token of his consecration." Just as the lifting up of iron on the altar would be a desecration of it (Ex. xx. 25), so would the bringing of a razor on the head of the Nazir be inconsistent with the sacred character he bears. The unshorn hair which he wore, was as much his specific mark, as the linen garment was that of the priest. Probably, the prohibition against cutting the hair meant, that there must be no interference with an object so entirely consecrated to God as the Nazir, so as to alter it from what nature has made it, and that as the hair growing to its full length is nature's protection of the person, it must be hallowed and remain untouched. Some, indeed many, were so devoted to the Lord for only eight days, others for a month, or longer, and we only read of three who were so devoted for life, Samuel, John the Baptist, and Samson (1 Saml. i. 11 ; Luke i. 15). We read also, that Paul at one time took such a vow (Acts xviii. 18 ; xxi. 24-26).

He will begin to deliver Israel, &c.] This implies that the Philistine oppression had been felt for some time. Let us suppose it to have lasted, as yet, but one year ; let us farther suppose that Samson was but 18 years old when he began to act as judge ; and again add up the 20 years that his judgeship lasted. This would amount to 39 years from the beginning of the oppression ; yet, the whole period of that oppression, was only 40 years. There would thus be only one year left for the inflicting of the final defeat under Samuel. It is also implied, that Samson was not to complete the deliverance ; he was but to lift the yoke partially from their neck, and inspire them with the hope that full freedom would come in the end.

He shall be a Nazarite unto God, and shall begin to deliver Israel.] There is certainly a connection between his being a Nazarite, and his being a deliverer of his people. It seems to be this. In the case of the other "Saviours," such as Ehud, Barak, Gideon, and Jephthah, the ground on which God gave them power, and the special fitness for delivering the suffering people, was either the repentance of the people, or what is practically the same thing, their crying to God in earnest prayer. But we hear nothing of this in the case of the generation of Samson's age. And as there must be some ground of righteous procedure brought forward, if God is to grant another "Saviour" now, He, Himself, appoints a special capacity to be sustained by the man whom He raises up to give deliverance. That capacity is, to be a person specially set apart for God, ceremonially free from all defilement, and hallowed for the doing of any service that God may require at his hand. On a man occupying such a capacity, God could confer His Holy Spirit consistently with his righteous character, and make him strong, wise, fearless, and successful in doing the work set before him. But the question is not what the man is in himself, in his own *personal character*, but in what he *represents*. Samson, in his heart and life, was not the spotless person which the theory of Nazaritism required him to be but the signs which he bore, were a standing law, pointing out what the character and conduct o those should be whom God would acknowledge as His own, and whom He would deliver from all evil. His Nazarite profession was really a protest against the iniquity of the times, and an illustration of the principles, which the "holy nation" must cultivate anew, if they were to receive the Divine protection.

Being a Nazarite, God could, consistently with His holy character, bestow on Samson the gift of superhuman strength, but when he suffered his locks to be shorn, he no longer retained the principal sign of his consecration to God, and so the gift which was conferred only out of respect to that consecration, departed from him.

6. A man of God.] Usually applied to "a prophet," or a man who is authorised to speak messages from God, such as Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, David, and others. To Manoah's wife he had a far nobler and more impressive look than men usually have, yet she does not seem to have recognised him as Divine.

8. Manoah entreated the Lord.] The name signifies "Rest." He was a man of prayer. How often are those who become blessings to the world, children of praying parents! Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, Solomon, and Timothy, all appear to have been the children of many prayers. The prayer, on this occasion, appears to have been acceptable unto God, and was heard. The same instructions, as to the training of the child, are given as before.

15. Let us detain Thee until.] Not yet having discerned the Divine character of his visitor, Manoah, full of gratitude for the joyous tidings, would offer him a warm hospitality (comp. Gen. xviii. 7; Heb. xiii. 2).

18. Why askest thou after my name, seeing it is secret?] The word is *Peli*, the same with *Pelé*, in Isaiah ix. 6, which is translated, *wonderful*. Meaning, that all about Him is most wonderful, or, He is the wonderful one beyond comparison with all others. The true rendering of the clause, therefore is, "seeing it is wonderful." That is not really telling his name, but describing its character. It is as if He had said, "Why ask after my name? seeing I am not known by a mere name, but by a character and mode of action, which belong only to myself, and cannot be devised or imitated by others. Everything about me is essentially wonderful," (comp. Ps. cxviii. 23; Ex. xvii.; xxxiv. 10). We must understand it to have the force of "absolutely and supremely wonderful," which can only apply to God. Bertheau tones it down to mean "neither easy to utter, nor easy to comprehend." Rather, we are to regard it as one of the hints which He always gives when He appears, that it is one who is Divine that has appeared.

19. Unto the Lord.] In obedience to the direction given in ver. 16. They still regarded their visitor as a messenger from God, and nothing more, or as they express it, "a man of God." So that their sacrifice was not to the visitor but to Jehovah. It was offered there and then, expressly by the direction of the visitor, which to them seemed sufficient to hallow the spot, though no offering, as a rule, could be accepted unless laid on the duly consecrated altar.

20. The angel ascended in the flame.] This was proof positive that he was Divine. **Fell on their faces.]** Paralysed with fear at the sudden disclosure of the fact that they had been talking with God face to face (Dan. x. 9; Num. xiv. 5; Lev. ix. 24; 1 Chron. xxi.).

22. We shall surely die because we have seen God.] They regarded Him as the Angel-Jehovah, and that was in their estimation the same as Jehovah himself. Many such appearances were made in Old Testament times (Gen. xviii. 25, 26; xix. 24; xxii. 11-15; xxviii. 13-17; xxxii. 30; xxxi. 11, 13; xxxv. 9-15; Ex. iii. 2-5; xiv. 19; xix. 17-20; xx. 21 22; xxiv. 9-11; xxxiii. 19-23; xxxiv. 5-8, etc., etc.). That the visitor in the present

case was Divine appears from two things especially—He brought fire out of the rock to consume the offering, and He vanished in the flame. That they should fear death to come to them because they had been face to face with God, is the natural instinct of a guilty mind, even in the case of those, in whom the good work is begun (see Gen. xxxii. 30; Ex. xxxiii. 20).

23 He would not have received a burnt offering, etc.] The wife proved a wise counsellor to her husband on this occasion. It is a specimen of excellent reasoning. The mercies God had shown to them were proofs that he regarded them with favour. Why confer such honour on them if He meant to kill them? Why pledge His word in promise to them, and then put them to death, so that that promise could not be fulfilled? Why did He accept their offerings on His altar? Surely the honour of the Divine truthfulness required that they should be preserved. Were not the mercies they had received pledges of the Divine love, and a reason for concluding that, since God had begun to bless them with promises of good, He would continue to bless them still? (Ps. cxv. 12; xxxvi. 10; Isa. xxvi. 12).

24. Called his name Samson.] The Hebrew form of the name is *Shimshon*, the root of which is *Shemesh*, "the sun." The meaning in that case would be *sun-like*, or *little sun*, or *hero of the sun*. *Josephus*, however, makes it *shimshom the strong*, or *daring one*, while yet others make it to mean *to minister*, in allusion to the Nazarites' consecration to the service of God. The Jewish expositors speak of Samson as "called after the name of God," who is the "sun and shield of Israel" (Ps. lxxxiv. 12). "The symbol of servitude is night (as in the case of the Egyptian oppression), but the beginning of freedom is as the dawn of day, or the rising of the sun." One of the legends places at the head of its narratives "the powerful knight, Samson, dark of complexion, like an Oriental, with 'hair and beard black as pitch,' and from whom the mighty race of the Amelungen springs."

The Lord blessed him.] This could hardly be said of a man who had nothing good in his character before God (Ps. vii. 11). God's blessing and God's curse cannot rest on the same man. He must have the one lot or the other. He may be severely chastised on account of grievous sins, but that does not decide the point that he is an ungodly character. God may do much for a wicked man. He may give him long life, a high station of honour, and many titles and distinctions; he may gratify his natural wishes to the full, and yet give these things without his blessing (Ps. lxxiii. 7-9). Nay, all the while these things may be working out his ruin (Ps. lxxiii. 18). We regard this statement, if not as decisive, at least as a strong point in Samson's favour as a religious character.

25. Began to move him in the camp of Dan.] The word here which is translated "to move" (פַּעֲמוֹ) signifies to *excite to action*. He was already conscious of his superior strength to other men, and, in view of what he saw around him, he was stirred up now and again by the Spirit of the Lord, to arise and use his power on behalf of his oppressed people. *Moses* was so stirred, though not so specially (Ex. ii. 11-14). *Paul* also (Acts xvii. 16). But this was before his actual exploits, such as slaying the lion, or making great slaughter of the Philistines. It seemed to be certain sudden impulses which the Spirit made him feel, to indicate that he had a mission before him in breaking the power of the oppressor. As the root of the word signifies an anvil, some think that these impulses were an intimation to him beforehand, that he was to smite the Philistines with repeated strokes as from a hammer on an anvil. But surely it was also an intimation that when the time came, he would be made fit for his work, according to the promise, "as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

In the camp of Dan] or *Mahaneh Dan*. This was an encampment formed by the armed 600, who formed a temporary settlement, which afterwards became permanent, in a district near Kirjah-jearim, when they went out in quest of the acquisition of new territory. The account is given in Chap. xviii. 11, 12, the date of which, was more than 300 years anterior to the days of Samson. This place was somewhat higher up the sides of the mountain than Zorah, but only a few miles distant from the young hero's home. Thither he must often have climbed as to one of the centres where a few patriots, still left in the land, were wont to congregate, and from them he would hear, from time to time, of fresh deeds of barbarity and oppression that were perpetrated on the homesteads of Israel, by the cruel enemies that occupied the plains below. Even at Zorah, every morning as he looked out at the door of his paternal dwelling, on the western slope of the mountains, his eye could take in not only the rich garden of the Shefelah, which belonged to his own tribe, but also a large sweep of the fertile fields beyond the borders, all over which, the enemy spread their tents, or built their cities, and which, at one time, had been trodden by the foot of the dreaded giants. "Many a band of these cruel plunderers, doubtless, he would see marching up the glen beneath his father's house, and returning again laden with the spoils of his brethren; many an act of rapine and cruel outrage, or even barbarous murder, left a deep impress on his mind, and stirred within him, thoughts of doing mighty deeds, on behalf of the oppressed."

Patriotic thoughts or feelings, however, are not to be confounded with the movements occasioned

by the Divine Spirit. Any supernatural operation of the Spirit on a man, is indeed ever in harmony with natural law, yet, is quite distinct in itself from natural law. We believe the Spirit took occasion from the impulses of patriotism, prompted by natural causes, to produce a higher class of impulses, that were peculiar to His own special working in the mind.

HOMILETIC REMARKS.—Verses 1–25.

AN UNTHOUGHT OF DELIVERER RAISED UP.

I. The thoughtfulness of God's mercy to a backsliding people.

1. *In sending chastisement at all.* That alone shows the considerateness of the Divine love. If the stone which has begun to roll down the steep be not stopped, and stopped soon, by some effectual means, it will inevitably dash on to the bottom, and be broken in a thousand splinters. If a fire be kindled in a house, it must be extinguished at once by any and every means, or it will soon envelope every object in the house in flames. So, if sin is left to do its natural work in the soul unchecked, it will ere long lead to irretrievable ruin. Hence those Divine utterances which tell us—"You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities." "He that spareth the rod hateth the child." (Ps. xciv. 12, etc.; Lev. xix. 17; Heb. xii. 6.) The confession is made by the afflicted person himself (Ps. cxix. 71, 75). The intention of the chastisement is often to remove what would be deleterious, or to assist growth (John xv. 2). To let a man alone while he is going on sinning, is a heavy judgment to him (Hos. iv. 17; Jer. xlviii. 11). Sharp chastisement is incomparably kinder treatment. When a man is asleep on the top of a precipice, the kind thing is to awaken him, however roughly rather than let him fall over into ruin.

Thus did God with His own people when He gave them into the hand of the fierce enemy here described. He only fulfilled the terms of His covenant (Ps. lxxxix. 30-34). Yet it remained true, that "all His paths were mercy and truth to such as kept His covenant.'

2. *In not removing the chastisement at once.* Were it to be so removed the greater part of the benefit to be gained by sending it would be lost. There is need for realising the bitterness of sin from the bitterness of its fruits (Jer. ii. 19). Nothing teaches like experience, especially when the father has to deal with "sottish children," a people of no understanding (Jer. iv. 22). When the mild whispers are not heard, love raises her voice to the hoarse notes rather than relinquish her object. A discipline is needed to make the heart become broken and contrite. "He subdues its iniquities," "heals its backslidings," and then "loves freely." It is like driving the ploughshare through the hard, beaten ground, and breaking it up by way of preparing the soil for the good seed. We must "suffer awhile" ere we are "made perfect"—must know something of the sorrows of the sinful state, ere we enter on the joys of the world where sin is unknown.

3. *In devising deliverance before the voice of prayer is heard.* While we are told in this chapter of the people's new sins, we hear nothing of their repentance, or their earnest cry for deliverance. The cry of distress with the symptoms of repentance, referred to in ch. x. 10-16, seems to refer to the experience and behaviour of the people under the oppression that was then going on *to the east of the Jordan* (see verses 8, 9), and not to the men of Judah, Benjamin and Dan, *to the west.* Even, therefore, if the oppressions were synchronous, which they only were in part at the very most, we cannot take

the expression of penitence given in ch. x., as applying to the western tribes that were now crushed under the tyranny of the Philistines.

We are left to believe that here there was no voice of prayer, nor turning of the heart to Him from whom they had so deeply revolted. They were still "enemies of God in their minds and by wicked works." Yet in these circumstances, thoughts of love sprung up in the Divine bosom, solely because of the great goodness that dwells eternally there.

God is so disposed to bless His people, that He sometimes hears their voice as soon as they begin to cry, and even before they have begun to do so, while, indeed, they are only purposing to do it (Isa. lxv. 24) (comp. Matt. vi. 8). But always, sooner or later, He hears them when they cry to Him with their whole heart (Jer. xxix. 12, 13). Here, however, such is His mercy, that He interposes on their behalf when they do not cry at all. Suffering has been sent, but they are chastised "like the bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." They do not know the why or wherefore of it all. They seem not to know that it is the hand of their God that is upon them, chastising them for their sins. Hence there is no prayer. They are beaten "like the horse or mule, whose mouth is kept in with bit and bridle." They do not see any moral instruction in it all, whereas those who have understanding of God's ways see a salutary course of training in those dealings, dictated by the loving kindness of the Lord (Psa. cvii. 43).

4. *In providing a remedy as soon as He begins to chastise.* This is specially to be noticed. The remedy indeed does not appear at once. The antidote is not applied on the very day when the bane is sent. For some considerable time, it looks as if there was no intention to remove the dreadful scourge. And yet all the while steps have been taken to provide a remedy suitable for removing the evil. The birth of Samson was thought of at the very beginning of the oppression by the Philistines. That oppression lasted forty years, of which time twenty years were occupied with Samson's judgeship, and most of the other twenty were filled up with his growth from infancy to manhood. The Philistines were not fully driven off till at least one year after Samson's death (1 Sam. vii. 13). And if we suppose that Samson began to judge Israel at the age of 18 or 19, then it follows that the message spoken of in this chapter was coeval with the date when the oppression began. The conclusion is manifest, that on the very day when the wound is made, steps are taken to furnish a balm for healing it!

What a touching proof we have in this, that God "afflicts not willingly" (Lam. iii. 33). It is not from feelings of hatred or revenge that He sends heavy judgments. There His nature entirely differs from ours. He bears no grudge, and cherishes no anger, against any class of men merely as men, as we do when provoked. His anger, which is most strong, is directed against sin, so that all who determine to live in sin, and will not give it up, *must* take the consequences. It is then according to laws that God acts, and not as we do, according to passionate feelings. The sending of this Philistine oppression on His people was out of respect to righteousness and truth, and not because He had lost His loving feelings to His own. For at the same moment that He applies the rod, He devises means to alleviate the strokes! The love which thinks of deliverance, is at work in the same breast, where jealousy for the honour of His holy name burns.

5. *In doing all this for a people hardened in sin.* It is when obstacles are placed in the stream that we see the strength of the current. The people with whom God was so considerate and tender in His dealings, were inveterately obstinate in clinging to their wicked ways. Every heart was determinedly barricaded against admitting Him. To bestow His mercies on them seemed

like casting pearls before swine. "They were all grievous revolters," their hearts like "brass and iron" for hardness. Yet it is long before the Divine mercy goes away. "How shall I give thee up—*thee*—My own Israel, whom I have redeemed, with whom I have entered into covenant! No! I will not give up. I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger, for I am God, and not man. If they will not hear the gentle zephyr, I will bring the thunder cloud. But I will not leave."

II. The salvation of Israel is entirely of the Lord.

A common place remark, but how valuable to see it always standing out before us on every page of this interesting history! The thought of it ever begins with Him. It springs from the abundant goodness of His own nature (1. Peter i. 3). So strong is the welling up of that goodness that it overflows the mightiest obstacles which sin in so many forms is ever putting in its way—by its stubbornness, its manifoldness, its malignity, its inveteracy, its intense antagonism to His holy nature, its mischievous influence, its ingratitude, and dishonour done to all His sacred perfections, and finally, its incurableness. How sincere and cordial His pity for the sinning people before Him! To the generation that has provoked Him to bring on them the terrible calamity of the captivity, He said, speaking through the weeping prophet: You may not think me sincere in professing loving kindness towards you because of these troubles, but in myself "I know the thoughts which I think toward you; thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end." In all the different crises which occurred in Israel's history as recorded in this Book, their refuge in the background when things came to the worst, was their God; though they had cast Him off, put other gods in his place, and provoked Him to anger daily by their systematic wickedness. For all that, "He only was their rock and defence—their expectation was only from Him." Let it be treasured up in the memory of every reader to His everlasting praise.

III God's honours are free to all His own people alike, though not to strangers.

It was the highest honour in that age which any Israelite could enjoy, to be raised up by God to act as the "Saviour" of the people, in a great crisis. This honour was distributed impartially among the various tribes. From *Judah* was taken an Othniel; from *Ephraim*, an Abdon and a Samuel; from *Benjamin*, an Ehud, and perhaps a Shamgar and a Deborah; from *Issachar*, a Tola; from *Zebulun*, an Ibzan and an Elon; from *Gad* (if the same with Gilead), Jair and Jephthah; from *Naphtali*, a Barak; from *Manasseh*, a Gideon; from *Dan*, a Samson; and perhaps from *Simeon*, a Shamgar, though it remains undecided. The only two tribes omitted are Reuben and Asher, and that may well be accounted for by the fact, that the deliverer was usually raised up near the point where the danger was greatest; and the tribes just named seem never to have been in such risk of destruction by an enemy as the other ten at some part of their history. But we never hear of any man outside Israel being raised up to be a defender of God's Church. All God's battles were fought by men of faith. All others were rejected, whatever might be their skill and prowess. The Church does not need the world's help. Her resources are within herself.

IV. The real guardian of the Church never deserts his post.

As we read through the account, one naturally inquires—Who is this kind friend, that now and again makes His appearance in the darkest nights of this

people's history, to save them from threatened ruin? He comes unsought, and even unknown; or the moment that He is known, He disappears from view. He does not appear before the public gaze, but shows himself to a solitary individual, whom He appoints to act for Him in carrying out plans for the redemption of the people. He seems always to be in the background, His step noiseless, His voice calm; no pomp of appearance, and no retinue surrounding Him. But He is there—with this people, knowing all that happens to them, knowing all their provocations and sins, but never losing sight of them or ceasing to interest himself on their behalf. He was with the Church in the wilderness; He appeared as the "Captain of the Lord's host," when the Church was about to fight her first battle with her enemies; when the people had lost Joshua and were about to pursue their course without a leader, again He appears to reprove them for the symptoms they were already beginning to give of their apostasy (Jud. ii. 1–5). In the days of the great oppression by Midian, when the land was groaning under the weight of its troubles, He appeared to Gideon and gave him a commission to become "the Saviour" of his Church. And now here we see the same never-forsaking friend, always throwing His shield round about them when they are getting under the paw of the lion.

No other people has such a protector. They stand alone among the nations. They have a friend that never dies, and his love never cools. He lives through all the ages and ever sits at the helm. What can it mean, but that He has a special charge of the church, never resigning his post and never permitting her enemies to accomplish her destruction. All this we find gloriously realised in the guardian care exercised over the church of the New Testament era, "He is head over all things to the Church which is His body," "He ever liveth to make intercession," "I am with you always to the end of the world," "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," "I have graven thee on the palms of Mine hands, thy walls are continually before me."

V. God is glorified by the diversity of the instrumentality He employs.

The deliverance of Israel is not always effected by one uniform method. Rather there is every possible variety. At one time, a member of one of the best families of Israel is selected to lead the people against the invader, and he is driven back. At another time a left-handed man is employed, who, by a single stroke, smites the head of the oppressor, and the enemy is thrown into confusion. Again a single man with an ox-goad makes such havoc in the ranks of the foe, that their inrush is arrested. Now it is a man from the woods of the north, who appears at the call of a woman, with a handful of mountaineers to meet a huge host with iron chariots in the plain, and in one short hour the imposing array is swept from the field. Again it is a man of sterling worth, but greatly unappreciated by those around him, that is found out by the Searcher of hearts, and brought from the operation of threshing wheat, to lead a small band of lion-hearted heroes against a countless multitude of invaders and ere the next sun arose, the whole living wave has passed away. Still again it is a refugee, who has found shelter in a foreign land, that is recalled and put at the head of the armies of Israel, and the legions of the enemy are scattered as the chaff before the wind. Now it is no longer a leader with an army at his back that stands before us—one man forms an army in himself, and an army so formidable, that the enemy fall in "heaps on heaps" before him. Before one single arm a whole nation is kept in terror.

What an illustrious display is thus given of the resources of the God of Israel. These resources are never exhausted. What is the practical lesson? "Trust

in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength—resources." "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" On and on indefinitely, this series of diversity of ways of redemption might be carried, without the necessity of repeating the old forms. What magazines of resources are at the disposal of Him, who has all hearts in His hands, and all events under His control! Man as God has made him, is a witness to this power in the Divine nature of producing an infinite diversity of expedients to accomplish the Divine purposes. For man is made with a craving after perpetual freshness of knowledge, which can only be met by the inexhaustible resources that are stored up in the mind of Him who made him. Whatever brings out this fulness of resources glorifies God.

VI. Israelites indeed are found in the most degenerate times.

The men of that generation appeared to be sunk in what might be called the lethargy of sin. It seemed as if nothing could quicken them, or raise them out of their stupor. When they were smitten again and again, they could not be brought to see that it was for their sins. They were of that doltish nature, that they could not read their sin in their punishment. It would have required a Hosea to rise up and describe their character. The terrible Philistine scourge could awaken no other sound among them than that of "howling on their beds" like stubborn beasts under the smart of the lash. "Their root was dried up, and bore no fruit." "Ephraim was like a cake not turned." Over the length and breadth of the land God's judgments were rolling, yet no voice of prayer is heard in the high places, nor is there any symptom of the heart of the people turning to the Lord. There is no confession of sin, nor are any Bochims found among their cities or places of public resort.

Thus it was with the masses. But God never leaves Himself without a witness. Here is one family known to the all-seeing eye among the hills of Dan, where in the two heads of the household, both faith and prayer seem to be in healthful exercise. The fear of God is in this home, the knowledge of His laws and statutes is still preserved, His word is law, offerings are made to Him on the altar, His promises are trusted, and His requirements are complied with. Northward, even in Ephraim itself, is another home of these times which forms an oasis in the desert, at the head of which stand an Elkanah and a Hannah, who, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, "walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless"—the home of a praying mother and a God-fearing father, a meet birthplace for such a child as Samuel. And near by is old Eli, the resident priest of Shiloh, whose dwelling-place was the tabernacle itself, and whose heart in these stormy times trembled for the ark of God all his life. There were also others in that age to whom everything about the name of God, and the service of God was dear. The daughter-in-law of Phinehas, who gave the name "Ichabod" to her child, because the ark of God was taken; Abinadab in the hill near where Manoah dwelt, and his son Eleazar; and by and bye a large company of penitents sprung up, doubtless in answer to the prayers of the few Israelites indeed, who had all along been left in the land (1 Sam. vii. 1, 2).

Thus it has been in every age. A Noah was found at a time when the earth was filled with violence, a Job in the land of Uz, and the family of a Terah, when the twilight of heathenism was beginning to overspread the earth, an Abraham and his seed for many generations while the gross darkness of heathenism prevailed, and many striking individual cases of true piety were ever coming up to relieve the dreary history until the great Light at last arose, which is destined in due time to dispel the darkness for ever. For it cannot be that the good man should entirely perish out of the earth. (1) *Then the earth*

would be ripe for destruction, and the thunders of heaven could no longer sleep. It is for the sake of the righteous in it that the world is not destroyed, and were they all removed there would be no argument to plead for its preservation. The case of Sodom is the proof. (2) *It would be too great a triumph to allow Satan to win over the cause of God on the earth.* All Satan's triumphs take place only by permission. The little finger of Him who defends the church in this world has more power in it, than all the hosts of the dark empire unitedly possess. But for wise reasons that hidden power is meantime held back, to allow the most ample liberty to the powers of darkness to bring forth their boasted strength. It is really weakness placed against strength, that we see on the spiritual battlefield, so that when victory comes, as it is sure to do, the victory may be all the more glorious on the one side, and the defeat all the more crushing on the other. Were the side of Truth, however, to become extinguished altogether, even for a time, it would be allowing one real triumph to the side of Error, and so leave a stain on the record of Truth's victories in the long run, as being less than perfect. (3) *It would be contrary to the promises made to the church.* "His name shall endure for ever." "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." "I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations," etc., etc. (4) *It is for the honour of Christ's providential rule, that the cause of unrighteousness and error should not gain a single real victory in their conflict with truth.* The Son of God is at work in the history of this world in destroying the works of the devil. It is to His honour, therefore, that amid all the seeming defeats of a Christian cause, there should not be one real defeat. As He loves His own name, He will see to it that the cause of evil shall never really conquer, but that uniformly in the end "dust shall be the serpent's meat."

VII. In all Divine deliverances wrought there must be respect paid to principles of righteousness.

No repentance, no salvation—is the uniform tone of New Testament teaching; and throughout the Book on every page, we find it was the same in the days of the judges. These "saviours" could not save until the people repented. On the occasion before us, as there was no public manifestation of penitence, the man who was raised up to deliver Israel has no army with him, for it would have been hard to find an army, even a small one, of men of faith at that time in the land; and of such materials usually did Israel's conquering armies consist. Since, however, there was to be deliverance, some means must be found to show respect to principles of righteousness in granting it. These we have in the conditions laid down for Samson while holding his office, which have been already explained. It was as a man professedly dedicated to the Lord and His service, hallowed in his person, and keeping himself separate from the world, that extraordinary strength was given him through the power of the Divine Spirit resting upon him.

This was indeed but a ceremonial dedication. Yet it was a picture of the principles, out of respect to which, the holy Lord gave to sinning Israel the benefit of a Samson's strong arm. And it is added, He only "began to deliver Israel." In point of fact, the crushing defeat of the enemy only took place in the days of Samuel (1 Sam. vii. 10—13). Full deliverance could not be granted until there was a living expression of penitence, such as is recorded in 1 Sam. vii. 2—4. The whole Bible might be quoted to show the absolute necessity of repentance where there is to be salvation. In the cross of Christ "grace does indeed reign, but it is through righteousness by Jesus Christ." God must have regard to His character as a just God, while He justifies, in place of condemning a sinner. And so "Jesus Christ is set forth as a propitiation

through faith in His blood to declare His righteousness in order to the remission of sins." Having shed His blood as a propitiation, "Christ is now the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth." Every sinner who goes to Jesus for salvation necessarily repents, for he admits the supreme necessity of the vindication of the Divine righteousness, ere his sins can be forgiven, and that the awful sufferings of the Cross alone can do that. To take salvation on that ground is to condemn his own sins in the most emphatic manner, and to admit that God must have the fullest satisfaction for them. That implies *conviction* of sin, and naturally leads to *sorrow* for it, and *turning from it* unto God.

VIII. Man's inability to see God's face without ceasing to live.

It was the general belief at that time that no man could see God and live. This may have been due to what Jacob said at Peniel (Gen. xxxii. 30), or to what God said to Moses at Sinai (see Ex. xxxiii. 20, &c.). In three ways this is true. (1.) On account of *guilt*. To a guilty man, God out of Christ is "a consuming fire." So it is expressed in Heb. xii. 29. Not that He is less loving than at other times, nor that any real change has passed over His character. But so intense is His love of purity, and so profound is His jealousy for the glory of His name, in the eternal calm of His nature, that without the slightest discomposure, His attitude to sin, and all that cling to it, must be like a fixed natural law, that of strong antagonism—an antagonism so strong as to mean the death of the soul. This antagonism of an infinite nature to one that is finite has all the effect of an irresistible fire, and is substantially the same with that which is called "everlasting fire" in the New Testament. It is the frown of the Lawgiver on the transgressor of His own law. Who can doubt that that will come down on those who die impenitent, precisely according to the manner in which they have sinned. (2.) On account of a creature's *weakness*. When any strong manifestation of God's character is made, a man naturally shrinks from it, and looks for some means of concealment. This is because of guilt. For why should innocence flee from purity? The holy angels in light who see the King's face are not afraid. Neither should we be so if perfectly pure. But even though spotless, the full blaze of the Divine glory might be overpowering to the holiest of creature natures, simply because of its transcendent brightness. No human eye could withstand the effulgence of the mid-day sun, so with a human soul before the full vision of God. For this reason many think there will never be a complete display of the glory of God made to the redeemed in heaven itself, but that there will always be some veil put on the Divine countenance, perhaps as many veils as there were curtains of goats' hair on the tabernacle, which were eleven in number. The general belief is that the *form* in which God will be seen by us in Heaven, will be the man Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER XIV.

SAMSON'S FIRST DEALINGS WITH THE PHILISTINES.

(Verses 1-20.)

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. Timnath.] This was a town on the frontier which, like many other towns had been at first assigned to Judah to subdue and occupy (Josh xv. 57), but as Dan had too small a territory for its people, it and other towns were transferred to Dan. It is referred

to in Josh. xiv. 43, also in ch. xv. 10. It was only a few miles from Samson's mountain home, and though it should have all along belonged to the Israelites, the tribe whose duty it was to subdue it, failed to do so through unbelief: and now the usual bitter fruits are reaped.

2. Get her for me to wife.] Heb. *Take* (קַח) Ex. xxi. 9. Though Samson may have come of age (18), it was customary for the parents to transact the arrangements, as they had the duty of paying the wife's dowry to the parents of the bride. What is here recorded is a bad beginning for the public life of a man, who was chosen to be a deliverer of God's Israel from their bondage. It has been suggested that it is only the briefest notices that are here given of his life, and there "may (as in Jacob's case), have been in him many exercises of true piety which, if told, would throw another light on his character." This, indeed, is not only possible but probable. It seems at any rate, that the reason for selecting the incidents here related to be put on record, was because this was the first occasion when he had the opportunity of showing himself as the public opponent of the Philistines. Indeed this is hinted at in ver. 4.

3. That thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines.] His parents remonstrated. They were astonished at the proposal he made, and began to reason. It was unnatural in itself, and it was in express opposition to the Divine law (Ex. xxxiv. 16; Deut. vii. 3, 4). But Samson being an only son would in all likelihood have been accustomed to carry all points his own way. For we are told that he prevailed on his parents to accompany him (ver. 5.)

4. His father and mother knew not that it was of the Lord that he sought an occasion against the Philistines.] This applies to Samson. Probably what took him down to Timnath at first was, that now being come of age it was time for him to begin the work he was raised up to do. For he had frequently felt the promptings of the Spirit of the Lord to begin the work. Now, therefore, as soon as he was entitled to go, he went to the camp of the enemy to "find some occasion" for beginning his work. Badly as the story tells for Samson, it would be to put a needlessly harsh construction on his conduct to say that he went simply on an idle stroll, or that he went in sportive mood. There is an important meaning in the statement that "he sought an occasion against the Philistines." He went, not knowing what might turn up, but his object was not merely to enjoy himself or have a little pastime. He wished to find some opportunity of commencing the duties of his high vocation. But he went unguarded against temptation, both as to eyes and ears (Ps. cxix. 37; Job xxxi. 1, 7).

The Philistines had dominion over Israel.] The crushing character of this dominion and its infinite degradation may be learned from I. Sam. xiii. 6, 7; also 19–21.

5. And his father and mother.] They went against their better judgment, being overcome by his importunity.

A young lion roared against him.] Being near the vineyards, probably in the valley of Sorek (Ch. xvi. 4), famous for its vines (Jer. ii. 21; Isa. v. 2), for the word *Sorek* means a *choice vine*.

6. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him.] Gave him superhuman strength, as a pledge of what he might expect to receive when fighting against men.

And he rent him as he would have rent a kid.] With as much ease, for all power is of God and He can make the human arm stronger than the jaws of the lion. Samson seems to have strayed into the bush, when he may have met the lion perhaps in the pursuit of jackals or foxes, that were often found in vineyards (Song ii. 15). His father and mother were not with him there. Hercules was most formidable in his wrestlings, but it was chiefly with beasts. Samson was raised up to be a conqueror of men. This passing encounter with a lion would never have gained him a high name in Israel even if frequently repeated. He had a mission to deliver God's Church. It is to be noticed that the word used here for lion does not mean a whelp, but one that has attained its strength, and is full of the natural fierceness. כְּפִיר means a terrible lion, one with a bloodthirsty character, or that has all its natural savageness of nature fully developed. Yet he tore its jaws asunder, as easily as he would have rent in pieces so slender an animal as a kid.

He told not his father and mother.] With all his self-will he seems deeply to have loved his parents, and where there is love there will always be some measure of respect. Hence he would not like to horrify them with the recital of so wild a story as the encounter with the lion. It might fill their minds with troublesome suspicions as to what he might do next, and so he would forfeit their confidence. Many would have boasted of such an exploit, and blazoned it abroad through the world. That was not Samson's weak point. No one seems to have known of it for many months, until the solution of the riddle brought it out He was not killed with vanity. The exploits of other heroes in their lion encounters were better known. Benaiah was known as the man who slew a lion in a pit in the time of snow. Wicker Von Schwabur, a hero

in the time of the Crusades, killed a great lion with the sword near Joppa, and Godfrey, of Bouillon, stood his ground against a bear in like manner. The lion fight of the fabled Hercules, in Nemea, is also well known The Arabian Antar conquers a lion although the hero's feet are fettered. But these two latter are little better than myths. There is one noble exception to the vain glory which accompanies any such heroic deed, in the case of the youthful shepherd of Bethlehem. But, indeed, both Samson and David might well have been afraid to boast of a power which was supernaturally given, and which showed the gracious protection of their covenant God.

7. Talked with the woman.] According to usage free conversation between the parties was not allowed till the affiancing took place. With the interview he had with the young woman Samson was pleased, and wished the arrangement to proceed.

8. An after a time.] Betrothing means giving one's troth, or faithful promise to marry a a future time. This time was at least six months, oftener a year, or more, after betrothal, bu during the interval the woman was considered as the lawful wife of the man to whom she was betrothed (Matt. i. 18 ; Luke i. 26, 27). It must then have been either several months, ora whole twelvemonth, after this ceremony, that Samson now went down to take his wife.

He turned aside to see the carcass of the lion.] It could hardly have been a twelvemonth, when the carcass lay there untouched all the time, even though it was not in the beaten path. As the hero passed near the spot the incident came into his mind, and under some pretext he left his parents for a little that he might look again on the scene of his memorable deliverance. This trivial circumstance was the leading of God's providence, for something great came of it. He found all that was most perishable of the beast long since gone, and nothing but the skeleton left, in which, to his no small surprise, was a swarm of bees. Bees as a rule avoid both dead bodies and carrion. Bees are so careful to select clean spots for their place of settlement, that a dead carcass was about the last place where they might be expected to alight. In the present case, however, everything that was noxious about the dead body had become long since dried up, both through lapse of time and the intense heat. Nothing of an offensive odour remained. There was no putrefaction.

Honey.] *Debash*, the ordinary word, or *Dvash*, as some would make it. *Deborah* using *r* for *s* is the word for *bee*.

9. He took thereof in his hands.] There must have been an abundant supply, for he gave some both to his father and mother, as well as partook of it liberally himself. Had his parents known where it was found, they would have rejected it as being unclean.

10. His father went down.] He only is mentioned as the head of the party, but the mother and other friends were doubtless there. Samson made a feast.] "There is a time to laugh and a time to dance, as well as a time to mourn and weep" (Eccl. iii. 4). This feast was on such a scale as to indicate wealth on the part of him who made it. It lasted seven days and embraced a large company. But it was customary, and to observe the custom was reckoned necessary to respectability.

11. When they saw him they brought thirty companions to be with him.] These were called the "children of the bride-chamber" (Matt. ix. 15 ; xxv. 1-12). But usually it was young women that went out to meet the bridegroom, while here it is young men that are mentioned. Also they were chosen by the bride's friends, not by those on Samson's side. Hence Josephus supposes they were chosen under pretence of doing him honour, while in reality they were meant to be a guard upon him (Josephus, Bertheau, Trapp, &c., &c.) The great strength of Samson must already have been begun to be talked about, and it must have been known, to some extent, that he was raised up to be a deliverer in Israel. This was quite in keeping with the phrase "they were with him." They seemed to be friends of the bridegroom, yet may have been spies upon him in reality, and a band of men to overpower him, if any hostility should be displayed by him. This would be in keeping with their conduct described in verse 15.

12. I will now put forth a riddle unto you.] Riddles were then, as now, much regarded as a means of amusement, or exciting interest on festive occasions. Thirty sheets (shirts) meaning clothes worn next the skin ; and thirty changes of garments.] Costly dresses that were frequently changed (Gen. xlv. 22). To propose such riddles at banquets by way of entertainment was customary among the ancient Grecians. Such clothes are referred to in II. Kings v 5, 22 ; Isa. iii. 6, 7 ; Matt. vi. 19 ; Gen. xlv. 22.

14. Out of the eater came forth meat, &c.] The spirit of this statement which is antithetical is "Food came from the devourer, and sweetness from that which is bitter."

But care must be taken not to push the antithesis too far. We must be guided by the actual fact, and also by the words of the text. The lion, to which the propounder of the riddle referred is distinguished not by bitterness, nor by sourness, but by strength, so that our English translation after all best corresponds with the fact—"out of the strong, etc." This, too, is confirmed by the answer given in the solution of the riddle—"what is stronger than a lion?" Besides the word in the text (עַז) does not mean "bitter," or "sour," but "strong."

15. On the seventh day.] For three days they tried hard to solve it but without success. They then gave it up till the seventh, when, as a last resort, they began to press hard on Samson's wife, threatening her with a terrible doom if she did not get the solution from her husband. "So doth the devil oftentimes do. Many a man's head he breaketh with his own rib; and this bait he hath found to take so well, that he has never changed it since he crept into Paradise" [*Trapp*]. This showed at once the baseness of their spirit, and the atrocious length in wickedness to which, if baffled, they were disposed to go.

Is it not so?] Meaning: You have called us to the feast, that by means of this riddle you might get from us all that we have. Your object has been to plunder us. Is it not so?

17. And she wept before him the seven days.] A Jewish mode of speaking, meaning, *unto the seventh day*, or as some would make it, *the rest of the seven days*. It might simply mean, that, more or less with tears she asked him to tell her every one of the seven days, her motives being partly curiosity, and still more, apprehensions of a disastrous issue to their hilarity should no solution be found. This would be intensely increased when, with loud voices, they threatened, as the time drew near, to burn her and her father's house with fire unless she should find out an explanation—hence on the seventh day particularly, "she lay sore upon him" until he told her. A woman's tears are her arguments, which oftentimes prove more powerful than all the logic of the other sex. They reach the heart by a more direct route than the understanding. Alexander of Greece replied to one who sent him a long letter complaining of his mother's conduct, "One tear of my mother's will blot out a thousand such letters."

She told it to the children of the people.] In this she proved a traitor to the interests of her husband, both because she was bound to consult his interests first, and also because she ought to have known that he was well able to defend her from all evil. Her affection was manifestly a mere pretence; but she was a true Philistine.

18. Before the sun went down.] Sunset was the end of the day, and so they were within the mark. Their statement meant, that the meat came from an animal that was distinguished for devouring meat, not supplying it, and that the meat supplied was honey, the sweetest of all kinds of food.

If ye had not ploughed with my heifer, etc.] Samson in a moment detected the treachery, for no one else knew anything of the story which he kept studiously concealed; and he pointedly told them it was owing to their plotting with his wife that the discovery had been made. In a case of such palpable unfairness, he might have refused to acknowledge himself to be under obligation to stand by the original terms proposed, but rather than incur the suspicion of dishonour, he nobly resolved to pass by the affront, and to pay the forfeit agreed on, more especially as this would give him occasion to fulfil his mission for the smiting of the Philistines. This tends to raise him in our estimation, if we could get over his capital error in wedding a Philistine at all.

19. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him.] These impulses came when God had work for him to do, but were not always with him. The prophets had not always the gift of prophecy, nor the apostles always the power of working miracles.—(*Trapp*). Samson seemed to feel that his vocation was to smite the Philistines on every fit opportunity given. Now he felt he had such an opportunity, and he resolved to punish the enemy that had dared to attack the people of Jehovah, and to pour contempt on His name.

Went down to Ashkelon.] There were many nearer at hand, but these may have been ring-leaders in raids made on the homes of Israel, or, more likely, he did not wish to create too great a sensation about the matter by destroying members of families in the immediate neighbourhood. The persons killed must have been high in social rank, when there were so many changes of raiment. That which Israel's champion flung at the feet of these vile cheaters was the attire of their own countrymen.

His anger was kindled, etc.] The base treachery of his wife on the occasion of their marriage festivity, the fact that her relatives supported her in her infidelity to him, and the apparent conspiracy of the whole Philistine community to give contemptuous treatment to an Israelitish family; all filled him with indignation, so that in place of returning for his wife he left the whole pack behind him, and directed his steps to his father's house, a sadder but a wiser man. How sweet is home after a taste of the bitterness of the world! His home was in Zorah, which

but for him would scarcely have been known to the world, just as Arpinum was known from its connection with Cicero, and Hippo was famous through Augustine.

20. Samson's wife was given to his companion, etc.] As soon as his back was turned the unprincipled Philistine gave his daughter to be the wife of another man—the very man who had acted as the friend of the bridegroom! Such was the bitter fruit of an unhallowed alliance (Jer. ii. 19).

Before proceeding to examine the details of this wonderful history, it may serve a good purpose first to look at it in its leading outlines. The judgment to be formed on the whole character of any man cannot be correct, if founded only on one or two acts of his life, and pre-eminently so in a case like that before us. It will greatly help to a just estimate on this important point, as well as aid us in a correct interpretation of individual particulars, if we first take a general view of the history in so far as it is given, and then take the details in their order.

General View of Samson's History.

I. It presents to us a puzzling character.

It is a character where opposite and seemingly contradictory phases are continually appearing. In every page of the account, inconsistencies occur so painfully, that we are perplexed what to make of a personality so unique. From the preliminary statement made in chap. xiii. by an "angel of the Lord," we are prepared to expect a man of peculiar sanctity of manner, of strong spiritual life, and one singularly free from worldly defilement, to make his appearance when he comes forth as God's servant to do God's work, under a more than ordinary effusion of the Divine Spirit's influence. But instead of that, the man who actually steps forward is one of a lower type than any name in the whole list of those who are called to be the "saviours" of God's Israel. It would be hard to say whether he did more good or evil when fulfilling his course, though by profession he stood strongly on the side of good. Instead of being a frequent associate of the righteous, we find him almost constantly in the society of the wicked. For those who look on he is more a beacon of warning than an example for guidance and encouragement.

No good man indeed, is entirely free from faults so long as he remains "in this wicked world" (Eccl. vii. 20). Here, however, is the case of a good man with great faults, but without correspondingly great excellences. It was not so with the other good men of scripture history. If David sinned once very grievously in the matter of Uriah the Hittite, and not infrequently said and did things inconsistent with a profession of genuine piety, he left behind him an unmistakable expression of heart-sorrow for his great sin, besides a whole volume of compositions that no man could have penned, whose bosom was not daily filled with the very spirit of heaven. If Jacob showed not a little of cunning and deceit in the early portion of his history, the vision of the ladder and the angels, his wrestling with the angel, and the whole of the latter part of his career, bring out strongly redeeming features of character. But with Samson there are no Alpine heights of excellence, such as to prove beyond doubt the heaven-soaring tendency of the general character. There is only a little eminence now and again rising above the plain, to set over against the morasses and marshy ground which shed a pestilential vapour over the surface.

But undoubtedly Samson had his good points of character, though there was much in his conduct to be condemned. If he had a comparatively low place in

the kingdom of God, it would be obviously wrong to suppose that he had no place there at all.

Notice—1. **The good features of his history.**

(1.) *He was specially raised up by God Himself.* His very existence was owing to the fact that God had a special work to do, and he was brought into existence to do it. His mother was barren, so that he could not have been born without a special Divine interposition. His very being thus partook of a sacred character. He was indeed a member of the fallen human race and liable to sin like other men, yet being directly provided by God, being commissioned by Him to do a work which he purposed to do, and being specially qualified by Him for the performance of that work, he must have been in a proper sense approved by God. John the Baptist was thus raised up by God (John i. 6). So was Isaac (Gen. xvii. 19; xviii. 14). So was Samuel (1 Sam. i. 11, 20). All these were holy characters. All inspired men were "holy men," whether prophets or apostles (2 Peter i. 21). Also all the "judges" of Israel appear to have been men who feared God, and wrought righteousness. It is questionable whether God ever called any wicked man into His service to do a work which had for its object the promotion of His glory. Balaam was indeed a wicked man, but he was not raised up by God, nor sent on a commission by Him. He was allowed to go to meet Balak with a wicked purpose in his heart, which God checked by turning the curse into a blessing. Judas was not honoured with a place among those whom Christ commissioned to set up His kingdom on earth, for he had left his Master's side and had "gone to his own place," before the commission was given. We have not a single instance of a really wicked man being specially raised up by God and sent to bless the people. This alone is a strong presumption, if not a decisive proof, that Samson, whatever his faults may have been, was at heart a man approved of by God.

(2.) *The mission on which he was sent was of a holy character.* It was to be the Deliverer and Protector of God's peculiar people. In reality he was sent to be the preserver of God's cause in the earth; for the office of that people was to uphold the honour of God's name, and to set up a standard for His worship among men. Is it likely, or even possible, that an ungodly man could be chosen by God for this purpose?

(3.) *He was a Nazarite from the beginning to the end of his life.* (ch. xiii. 5.) This implies that he was vowed to the Lord, and that his life itself was a consecration to the service of the Lord (comp. i. Sam. i 11). "This consecration had its roots in living faith, and its outward manifestation negatively, in absence from everything unclean, positively, in wearing the hair uncut." [*Keil*]. The person of Samson wearing the character of a Nazarite was made use of by God as a picture, to show to His people, that their weakness lay in losing their character as consecrated to Him, and mixing themselves up with unclean persons and things, whereas, by vowing themselves to be His all life through, and jealously avoiding everything that would contaminate them as a holy nation, they would acquire a strength that would make them invincible. Samson was in this sense a parable to Israel. One put into this position by God Himself surely must have had the roots of a genuine religious character.

(4.) *He was a child of prayer, and had a pious training.* From ch. xiii. 8, 9 we conclude, that his father was accustomed to approach his God in prayer, in such a manner that his petitions were heard, for his difficulty he referred to Him, and his desire was granted. His prayer must have been well pleasing to God, and its being so on this occasion is a proof that it must have been so on other occasions. We may feel justified in regarding him as an "Israelite indeed," for

the whole account bears out that he was a righteous man. Not less so was his wife (v. 23). The honour conferred on them by the angel's visit, and the special gift bestowed, prove this. Probably the gift of a son was in answer to their prayers, as in the case of Hannah. We may assume then, without being expressly told, that Samson had pious parents who were in the practice of prayer, and that they prayed much for their only son, so specially given.

As to his training, he could see nothing but good in such a household. The fear of God was in that home habitually, and being a mountain home it stood apart from the outside polluting world. The name of the true God alone was worshipped, and His laws were obeyed.

(5.) *The Lord specially blessed him.* We never hear of God conferring a special blessing on a man who did not bear something of God's image. (see p. 471.)

(6.) *The Spirit of God often came upon him.* We admit the important distinction between the *natural* and the *gracious* operations of the Divine Spirit, the latter being the peculiar privilege of the righteous, while the former, not relating directly to salvation, might be given to those whose hearts are not right with God. Yet in another aspect of the case, nothing is more sacred than God's own character, and when even the natural influences of the Spirit are given to preserve that, they are given for a sacred purpose, and so are fitly conferred only on those who are "chosen vessels" to the Lord.

It is certainly a strong presumption that that man is himself a man of God, on whom the Spirit of the Lord should descend so often as He did on Samson, for purposes which concerned the honour of the Divine name. The cases referred to in 1 Sam. x. 11, and Matt. vii. 22, 23, are exceptional, and do not imply that these persons had a direct commission from God, to vindicate the honourof His holy name as Samson undoubtedly had.

(7.) *He lived a life of faith in the God of Israel.* This was the whole bearing of his life. Though having so much to do with the worshippers of other gods, it underlies his whole history, that he kept his trust in the one living and true God. He regarded himself as the "servant of the God of Israel," and the Philistines whom he slew in such numbers he looked on as the "uncircumcised," who had put forth unhallowed hands against the people who were under special Divine protection. There was thus a tone of reverence in the doing of his work. It was done to God, and for the honour of His name. Besides, he did not rely on his own arm for victory or deliverance, though that was exceptionally strong, but he looked to God as his buckler and shield, and ascribed to Him all the glory of the victories he gained. "Thou hast given this great deliverance to thy servant" (ch. xv. 18). This an ungodly man was not very likely to do. It is a sure proof of faith, as opposed to mere patriotism. The one has respect to God and His glory, while the other is concerned with our own glory, and that of the community with whom we are associated. The latter, though praiseworthy and to be commended, is of a greatly lower mark than the former.

The principle of his life was that of faith in the God of Israel, and hence we find his name put down in the list of those that are to be had in everlasting remembrance in the Church of God (Heb. xi. 32). As the basis of his conduct, he believed in God in all things, and took direction in life from Him, though frequently his practice was at variance with his profession.

II. The bad features of his history.

(1.) *He became the intimate and frequent associate of the wicked.* It is indeed a modifying element in the case, that his life-work consisted very much in being a scourge to the enemies of God's Israel, and therefore, that it was his

duty to look out for occasions when he might discharge this work, yet it is strange that we never hear of his asking counsel at the mouth of the Lord, for direction in the fulfilment of his duty. In the case of most others who were sent on a special mission by God, we find there was frequent communication between them and their God for direction in the way of duty, before they started on their course. This was the case with Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and Jephthah, not to mention other names. But here there is not a word of intercourse between God and His servant, before the latter embarks on his hazardous course. There is no prayer of any kind, by way of committing his steps into the hands of God, as in the case of Jacob (Gen. xxviii). Nor do we hear of any precautions taken to avoid the sunken rocks, and dangerous whirlpools of the voyage of human life before him. The instinct of a man whose piety had a healthful tone would have suggested the propriety of doing both these things before he entered on his work.

It was symptomatic of a low state of piety, when Samson, a young man, inexperienced in the ways of the world, went out alone into such a society as that of the Philistines, without special prayer, and without much of the spirit of watchfulness. We might add, he seems to have had no definite plan before him, as to what he should do. The lines are not indeed inapplicable—

> "Satan finds some mischief still,
> For idle hands to do."

His visit to Timnath seems to have been aimless and censurable. This would make him all the more likely to catch infection from an evil atmosphere. The best supposition we can make is, that he went to see what God would set before him to do among these oppressors when actually on the ground. But he seems to have heard no voice calling to him in serious tones "enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men." (Prov. iv. 14, 15; xiii. 20; 2 Cor. vi. 14–16, 17).

Two things are specially unfavourable in his intercourse with these wicked, of a general kind. One is, that he went among them as *one off his guard.* This he must have known to be wrong, for no charge was given to parents more impressively, than that they should teach their children to avoid the companionship of the heathen around them. And Samson's parents were least of all likely to forget this in the case of an only son, and one who was a Nazarite from his youth up. The other unfavourable feature is, that he *spent the most of his public life among the idol-worshippers.* A healthful spirituality of character repels all close intercourse with moral evil. "Gather not my soul with sinners, &c." (Ps. xvi. 3; 2 Cor. vi. 14; Ps. xxvi. 5; cxix. 63, 158). He had indeed much to do in the way of chastising these people as a matter of duty; and it is to his credit, that, though he stood among them alone, he was never tempted for a moment to renounce the God of Israel, for the sake of joining with them in their idol-worship. Yet it is a matter of sorrow, that we never hear of this champion of God's cause associating with any other class of men but these uncircumcised.

(2.) *His intermarriage with a Philistine family. (a.) This was a breach of a solemn law laid down by God.* Before the chosen people entered Canaan, they were expressly and repeatedly informed, that the inhabitants of the land were to be destroyed judicially because of their enormous wickedness, that they must not associate with them as friends, or even as neighbours, and much less were they to think of associating with them by marriage relationships. This was said especially of seven nations that are specified by name (Deut. vii. 1-4; Josh. xxiii. 12, 13). See above on ch. iii. 6, 7. The Philistines are not mentioned by name in this list, yet they belonged to the same class of nations, and were guilty of the same sins. All the reasons for keeping aloof from the

Canaanites applied equally to these Philistines. Intermarriage with a Philistine therefore, was an act of disobedience to a Divine command.

(b.) It was an express dishonour done to the name of God. All who were jealous for the honour of God, were bound to make a loud protest against the manner in which that honour was laid in the dust by these profane idol-worshippers. To stand by and look on with unconcern, while the greatest indignity was done to the name of the great Jehovah, was itself to incur the heavy expression of the Divine displeasure. Much more heinous was the conduct of those, who should join hands in the fastest friendship with the blasphemers of that holy and dreadful name. There was no middle course in such a case. "The friendship of the world was held to be enmity with God."

(c.) It was to bring a blight on one's personal religion. It exposed one to strong temptations every hour of the day—to love the creature more than the Creator. The situation was so perilous to one's stability of principle, that not even the strongest built-up religious character could resist the aggressions of evil influence constantly coming in, without the help of the grace of God in keeping the feet from falling. A man's greatest enemy in such a case was one of his own house, and even of his own bosom. True piety to the God of Israel could not possibly flourish, in a circle where a believer was joined in wedlock with an idolater. "No one can serve two masters." And so it turned out, that these unnatural intermarriages always led to apostasy from the living and true God.

(3.) *His deeds of blood and revenge.* One of these was his visit to Ashkelon, and there putting to death thirty men in cold blood, all of them unknown to him, and who had done him no harm. His only motive was, to find the rich dresses which he required to pay the costs of his wager. Again we see him, in mad anger, burning the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives, over many acres of the best part of the country. On two other occasions he makes a great slaughter among the Philistines, the motives of which are revenge. In these and similar deeds which are recorded, he doubtless fulfilled his vocation so far in punishing that oppressing people for their cruelty to God's Israel; but, in most cases, the immediate reason he had for these steps was his desire for revenge. In so far as that was his prompting motive, it cannot be justified.

(4.) *His licentiousness.* This has usually been reckoned the great blot in Samson's character, and on looking at all the facts given in the record, we see no other conclusion possible than that, to a certain extent, he is fairly chargeable with it; not that he was a habitual libertine, but being of impulsive character he was liable to fall before temptation. The account given in ch. xiv. is not conclusive, for though he loved a woman in the Philistine city of Timnath, he appears to have acted honourably in wishing to be married to her, according to the rules of propriety then generally recognised. His error in this chapter consisted chiefly in wedding a Philistine. But his conduct as detailed in ch. xvi. is altogether inexcusable. Impurity between the sexes is a sin condemned alike by the moral instinct of every rightly constituted mind, and by the express denunciations of the word of God.

That this is one of the grosser sins needs no proof. In regard to no sin has God implanted a deeper sense of shame than this, nor has any been surrounded with a stronger natural restraint to prevent its commission. It implies, too, the subjection of the spiritual element in our nature to the animal, or the ascendancy of the bestial over that which we have in common with the angelic nature. No wonder that a deep shadow falls on the name of Samson, from what is here recorded. But yet serious mistakes have been made.

II. How are we to judge this character?

No man's sins should be looked at in the abstract, or apart from the cloud of circumstances, under which they have been committed. There are always considerations which will either deepen or lessen the criminality of the case in hand, though in no case can the criminality of a really sinful act be entirely taken away.

(1.) *It is but a specimen of the conduct, not the whole life that is given in Scripture.* We have indeed but nine special acts recorded from first to last each of which could not have occupied much time in the transacting. But he had twenty years of public life, and from these nine acts, we are left to judge of the character of the whole life. Doubtless, in so far as such a small number of acts could indicate the spirit of the man's life, we must hold the selection to be well made; yet, we must not forget, that in so long a history many things must have been said and done, which, if all had been told, would have presented a much wider basis of judgment than is actually afforded. The severest brevity is necessary in a book like the Bible, which, touching on so many points, must yet be compact enough to be portable. What is selected for notice, however, is always such as to give a just idea of the real character. There must, however, have been a much larger number both of good deeds and bad deeds in the whole life.

(2.) *We must remember the age in which he lived.* It is not easy to ply one's boat against the stream, and especially when the stream has become a rapid current. Those times were greatly degenerate, so much so that the moral mainspring of the nation seemed to be broken. Though severely smitten, backsliding Israel knew not how to return to their God. With the exception of a few little arks of preservation here and there, iniquity, as a mighty flood, had overspread the land. The religious light was dim: indeed, in some places, it seemed as if the lamp of God had gone out, and the nation were groping in darkness. Immorality of all kinds was so common that it was little regarded. It is manifest that temptations to sin in such an age were far stronger than when the moral standard stood high, and powerful restraints were raised up on all hands to any transgression of the Divine law.

(3.) *His mission led him to associate much with the wicked.* We believe he was too often and too long in the atmosphere of evil, and all too little in the companionship of the good. For though the pure circles were few and far between, they did exist as "lights shining in a dark place." Yet if his mission practically, really was to harass the oppressors of Israel, and to be a bulwark against their attacks, it was necessary for him often to meet with them. This exposed him to much danger, and required much prayer and much watching to protect him from the evil influence. His error seems to have been that he placed himself too little under the Divine guidance, and in the Divine keeping. Going down to Timnath for the first time, a perfect stranger, a scene rank with moral malaria, he ought to have "prayed without ceasing," in the spirit of the words, "lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil." In an unguarded moment, through the eye the heart is led captive, and quickly he is ensnared to enter into marriage relationship with the member of a heathen family. One has said, "it is needful to set a strong guard on our outward senses, for these are Satan's landing places, especially the eye and the ear."

(4.) *He had certain weak points in his character.* Scripture itself speaks of the "sin which easily besets us," it may be on account of our natural temperament or disposition, or on account of training or force of temptation. Some have a special tendency to pride, others to selfishness, some to ambition, others

to avarice, some are prone to jealousy others to deceit and double dealing, some are inclined to detraction, others to stealing and circumvention, some are given to prevarication, others to evil speaking, some are addicted to excess of wine, others to impurity. This last appears to have been the fatal weakness of Israel's defender, which though it does not palliate his sin accounts for its commission. When a man has a constitutional tendency to any sin it requires a greater effort for him to resist the downward tendency. "Satan, like a skilful angler, baits his hook according to the appetite of the fish."

(5.) *He did not realise the danger of his position.* This may have arisen partly, from his youth and unacquaintance with the lures and enticements of the world; partly, from his conscious strength, which led him on no occasion to fear the face of man; partly, from a certain self-willedness, owing to his being an only son, and being accustomed by his parents ever to have his own way; from various causes he seems not to have realised his danger, until he actually fell into the traps which Satan had laid for the unwary bird. How differently it might have fared with him had he daily, and even hourly, come to the Throne of grace, to find grace to help him in the measure of his need. But he seems not to have reflected that he was on an "Enchanted Ground," that the poison of the old serpent hung in sparkling drops on every blade of grass, and that every potion he put to his lips was drugged. May God grant that we all have both eyes and ears wide open while we are still treading so dangerous a territory.

III. The need of caution in judging religious character.

To judge of any man's moral or religious character is to tread on extremely delicate ground. The right to pass any judgment at all is more than questionable, and the range within which it may be allowed is extremely limited. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." But where the right is exercised, in few cases we believe have more shallow, inconsiderate, unjust, and unnecessarily severe judgments been formed of any one's religious character, than in that of the man brought before us in these pages. How many judge him as if he had passed life in the light of modern times, as if he had no, or few disadvantages, and as if there were nothing trying or peculiar in the situation in which he was placed! How many regard him as one of the worst of men, a disgrace to the nation to which he belonged, one who habitually indulged in debasing vices, and altogether unfit to enter into the kingdom of God! Some even go so far as to say, that, because this name stands in the list of the men who became famous through their faith, therefore the whole list must be condemned as not necessarily a list of religious men. In the life of this man they see nothing but dark passions, foul associations, and ungodly practices.

That Samson's character was one, which in many respects is not to be imitated, will be admitted by all; that many of his acts must be severely censured is at once conceded, but that he plunged systematically into all manner of excesses is not on the record. It is overlooked by the censors, that he was commissioned by God Himself to do a great work for His church and people, that, though he was severely punished for his sins, his last cry for help was granted, and that it is a dangerous thing to denounce a man utterly whom God does not cast away. That he had certain bright sides of character is also undoubted.

There is need of caution in this matter, because—

(1.) *We ourselves are transgressors.* This circumstance alone should make us hesitate. Were we pure and spotless like the native sons of light, there

might be some propriety in coming forward to denounce those who have blemishes and imperfections of character. But, as the case stands, with what force may it be said in the case of many, "Wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself." If we stand clear of the grosser sins in the catalogue, are we not all rebels against God's authority, and wanting in love to Him with all the heart, soul, strength and mind? Have we not, all of us, reason to be ashamed to lift up our heads before the holy, because of our spiritual vileness and ungodliness? Who among us has not lost character in the universe of the holy? What presumption is it then to come forward as critics of the character of others, when, in the most essential features we have lost our own!

(2.) *It is not our province to judge others.* We are not judges but subjects of judgment. This is true of all men. It is a species of impertinence of the worst kind. It is more heinous still, when one goes the length of daring to say what ought to be the treatment which should be measured out to a man by the Judge of all the earth, and whether he should be admitted into the kingdom of the holy or not. We fear that were the issues to be according to the verdicts which men pass on each other's characters before God, the final heaven would be a thinly-peopled home (James iv. 11, 12). God alone is Lord of the conscience, and it is "by Him that actions are weighed" (Matt. vii. 1, 2).

(3.) *It is sinful to judge in a light spirit and without a due sense of responsibility.* Many thoughtless people find it so easy, and indeed so congenial an exercise for heartless natures, to sit in the chair of judgment, that it does not occur to them that there is responsibility in the opinions they express. They do not reflect that no more deadly stab can be given to a fellow creature than when they throw out aspersions against his moral or religious character. Those aspersions may be utterly futile in producing any injurious effect, but it is only because of the weakness of the hand that throws them, and not that the weapons used are less deadly in character, or that there is any lack of intention to do evil. Such persons do not reflect that they assume the unenviable office of being the murderers of the characters of others, who are not only unjustly accused by them, but who may be all the while within the kingdom of heaven, while the accusers themselves are standing without. In all cases, great is the responsibility of using an unbridled tongue in speaking of the religious character or conduct of others. What should we think of a man taking liberties with his neighbour by shooting darts into the apple of his eye?

(4.) *It is by the whole character that a man is to be judged.* In every good man there are faults and also redeeming features. There is the "old man," and also the "new man." "Men are to be estimated by the mass of character. A block of tin has often a grain of silver, but still it is tin, and a block of silver may have an alloy of tin but still it is silver. The mass of David's character was excellence, but with alloy." It is a very great fault in any man himself when he can see nothing in his neighbour but faults, or when, because of the faults he sees, he presumes that there can be no excellences. Those who busy themselves in finding motes in the eyes of others, generally have a beam of no small dimensions in their own. Perfection even in the best of God's people does not exist in this world. Every good man is here in a transition state, The leaven of holiness has begun to work, and in due time will leaven the whole mass, but not as yet; so that, however much to be deplored, and however great the guilt implied, sin may be expected to break out, more or less, through strong temptation, or when one neglects to pray and be on his guard.

(5.) *We have a very partial knowledge of the character of others.* We look only "on the outward appearance, the Lord alone looketh on the heart." Our

best practical rule is, "by their fruits ye shall know them." Yet that rule applies only for practical purposes in our dealings with men. It does not reveal the motives and aims of action, nor tell the "secret thoughts and intents of the heart." A man's character is often misconstrued by his fellow men. There is an inner life going on which is little indicated by the external manner, until a special time comes round, when particularly testing circumstances occur, and bring to light what was never supposed to exist. The secret springs of a man's character are known only to the all-seeing eye. Hence the great need of caution in forming a judgment, lest while looking only at what appears, we should make a serious mistake as to what exists in reality.

(6.) *It is not the greatness of a man's sin that finally decides his character, but his impenitence.* Sin is never to be otherwise than severely condemned, and the greater the sin is, the more emphatic must the condemnation be. Yet, great as the distinction is between what might be called the least sin, and the greatest sin, that distinction is small compared with the difference between the least sin and no sin. The former is a difference of degree, the latter is one of principle. So great a matter is it to find an expiation for sin in the principle of it, that when that is found, the difficulty is got over in expiating sin in any degree of it. Let a sin be ever so great, it can be expiated by that which suffices to atone for the principle of sin. Hence the greatness of a man's sins, however much they are to be execrated, will not block his way to receive pardon, provided there is suitable penitence.

But we fear there is less likelihood of penitence in the case of wilful and known sin. It is also more provoking to God, and it puts a deeper stamp of reproach on the character in the eyes of fellow man. Yet it would be highly derogatory to the value of Christ's blood to say that it could not wipe out the stain of the greatest sin, if the sinner takes refuge in that blood, and turns from his sin unto God, with endeavour after new obedience. It is not the greatness of the sin that finally condemns anyone, but the not repenting of sin. Neither is it the greatness of the breach a man makes in God's laws that finally determines what his state is to be, but his obstinate continuance in impenitence.

HOMILETIC REMARKS ON CHAPTER XIV.

I. The need of watchfulness in the enemy's country.

(1.) *Because the enemy himself is ever awake.* Saul would not have slept in the trench had he known that David was so near. Sisera would not have laid down to rest had he seen the nail and the hammer in the hand of Jael. "Hannibal is at the gates!" was enough to keep all Rome awake; and so the warning, that "the roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour," may keep us all, and always on our guard (Matt. xxiv. 43).

(2.) *There is much evil latent in the heart.* On that evil within a man Satan plants his temptations. Here was his difficulty with the Saviour—"the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me"—nothing on which to plant his enticements to sin. Were there no traitors in the camp, the danger would be less; but there is gunpowder lying all about in our case, and one spark is enough to create an explosion. "There is a secret disposition in every man's heart to sin. Temptation does not fall on one, as a ball of fire on ice or snow, but as a spark or tinder, or lightning on a thatched roof, which is at once on flame (James i. 14.) The fowler lays the snare, but the bird's own desire betrays it into the net."

(3.) *The beginnings of evil lead to more.* A few drops oozing through an embankment may make a passage for the whole lake of waters. Little sins if allowed are the beginnings of great ones. In robbing a house, thieves put in a little boy at the window, whose work is to open the door and let them in; so the tempter, in rifling the soul, employs temptation to some smaller sin, which, little though it be, is sufficient to unlock the bars of conscience, and prepare for the commission of gross crimes. A pore in the body may be a door wide enough to let in a disease.

(4.) *The path of duty sometimes leads close to the edges of sin.* It was Samson's duty to have to do with Philistines. It required sharp looking round about on all sides, to avoid the darts of the wicked one. "It is not safe to bring gunpowder within the reach even of a spark; nor is it wise, however dexterous your driving, to shave with your wheels the edge of a beetling precipice; nor is it without the greatest danger, in the best-built bark that ever rode the waves, to sail on the outermost rim of a roaring whirlpool." "Many a duty lies between Scylla and Charybdis. Faith cuts its way between the Mountain of Presumption, and the Gulf of Despair. No truth but has some error next door." Examples in Samson, Joseph, Jephthah, David, etc.

(5.) *We must watch all round.* "The city cannot be safe unless the whole line be kept. It is all one whether the enemy breaks in at the front, flank, or rear of an army; or whether the ship be taken at sea, or sink in the haven when the voyage is over. The honest watchman doth not limit his care to the house or street, but walks the rounds and compasseth the whole town. So the whole man must be watched. A strong guard must be set about the outward sense, for these are Satan's landing places, especially the eye and the ear." Neglect of this was Samson's mistake (Job xxxi. 1; Ps. ci. 3, cxli. 3, 4). "There is a white devil of spiritual pride, as well as a black devil of fleshly lusts; and if only Satan can ruin us, it is all the same to him by what engines he does it; it is all the same whether we go down to hell as gross carnal sinners, or as elated self-righteous saints."

(6.) *We must watch at all times.* There are times of special danger, as for instance after great manifestations of the Divine love. There is danger of being lifted up with pride, and so falling into the condemnation of the devil (2 Cor. xii. 7 etc.; Luke xxii. 31,32). "As a pirate sets on the ship that is heavily laden, so when a soul has been filled with spiritual comforts, the devil, full of envy, will keep shooting at him to rob him of all. After great services, honours and mercies, there are critical times of danger. Noah, Lot, David and Solomon fell in these circumstances. Satan is a footpad who dares not attack a man going to the bank, but when returning with his pockets full of money."

XI. Man's sin often overruled by God for His people's good.

It was sinful for Samson to form a family connection with these God-despising heathens. Yet God overruled this sinful step to bring about the deliverance of Israel from their oppressors. "It was of the Lord" to allow Samson to follow his own natural inclinations, that out of the events which naturally followed, occasion might arise for the chastisement of these cruel and ungodly men. Joseph's brethren sold their brother into Egypt as a slave. They "thought evil towards him, but God meant it for good, etc." (Gen. l. 20). Pilate and the Jewish rulers took "with wicked hands and crucified" the Lord of glory, to gratify their own malice and sinful purposes, yet God overruled this greatest of sins for the purpose of fulfilling what had been spoken by all the prophets from

the beginning of time, that Christ should suffer in men's stead and so open the way for their becoming reconciled to God. All the calamities which befel Israel from time to time, through the invasion of surrounding nations, each a most afflictive scourge while it lasted, though prompted by malice, envy and lust of power, were yet overruled by God to discipline His people, to prevent their falling into apostasy and to preserve them on earth as a God-fearing nation.

III. The difficult battle which some have to fight in fulfilling their duty to their God.

Samson's lot was to fight these Philistines, and with carnal weapons. At that time too the Philistines had the upper hand, while Samson must combat them all alone. Every man has his post assigned him all over the field. Some like David or Jephthah have to occupy for a long time the position of outlaws, and to show their fidelity to their God at the head of bands of lawless men. Others like Jonathan have sometimes to meet a whole army in the field, though all alone. Others like Elijah have to stand up and reprove a whole nation with their king at their head, and require them to engage in immediate repentance. Still others, like Moses, had to conduct a murmuring and stiff-necked people for forty years through a barren wilderness. And the first preachers of the cross had to stand forth and proclaim in the ears of a proud and rebellious world the most humbling and unpalatable of all truths, as the only road to pardon of sin, and hope for the eternal future. Indeed no lot in Christ's service is without a cross. Self denial is the general law (Luke xiv. 26, 27); but there is a blessed compensation (Luke xviii. 28-30).

IV. Those who are in Divine keeping receive special strength amid special dangers.

Just as God encouraged Moses when entering on His service, first by turning his rod into a serpent, and then by turning the serpent into a rod; and, as He encouraged David in like manner, by enabling him to slay both a lion and a bear, as a pledge of future victories in God's service, so now is Samson fortified against the dangers of his future career. He was destined to have many encounters with human lions, and now a picture is presented to him of the success which would crown his efforts in the fight. "The beast came bristling up his fearful mane, wafting his raised tail, his eyes sparkling with fury, his mouth roaring out knells of his last passage, and breathing death from his nostrils at the prey before him. But the Spirit of the Lord came on Samson. He that made the lions to stand in awe of Adam, Noah, and Daniel, now subdued this strong animal before Samson, so that he tore him in pieces as he would have rent a slender kid. And if his bones had been brass, and his skin plates of iron, it had been all one before a man who received the strength of Omnipotence for the moment." [*Hall.*]

"If the roaring lion of hell should find us alone among the vineyards of the Philistines, where is our hope? Not in our heels, he is swifter than we; not in our weapons, we are naturally unarmed; not in our hands, for they are weak and nerveless, but in the Spirit of that God by whom we can do all things, who giveth power to the faint, and, to them that have no might, increaseth strength. There is a stronger lion in the believer than that which roars against him." [*Hall.*]

God gives assurance of such succour to all His people (Deut. xxxiii. 25). Thus it was with Paul (2 Tim. iv. 17, 18; Phil. iv. 13); with David (1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35); with Jeremiah (Jer. xx. 11); with Daniel (Dan. vi. 22); with the Saviour Himself (Isa. l. 6, 7); with all Christ's people (Isa. xl. 29–31)

V. Those who do the mighty deeds of faith are the least disposed to boast of themselves.

The conquest over the lion was gained we believe through faith. When the Spirit of God came mightily on any of those who were specially commissioned to do God's work, it was always accompanied by the exercise of strong faith on the part of the chosen instrument. He looked only to God for the needed strength (Ps. cxviii. 6-14; xviii. 29-36; Ps. lxxi. 16). Samson himself, though conscious of a far greater than the ordinary measure of a man's strength, yet never boasts of that strength as his own, but on one special occasion expressly ascribes the deliverance given to the hand of God (ch. xv. 18). That we take as an example of what he always did; for the few particulars recorded respecting him are always to be understood as a specimen of how he did in many other cases which are not recorded. Though it is not expressly mentioned in other cases that he did his exploits through faith, or immediate application to his God for promised strength, the fact that it is expressly mentioned in one case is an indication of what it always was with him. And this is confirmed by the fact that his name is given in the list of those who "obtained a good report through faith." He as well as Daniel may be said to have "stopped the mouths of lions."

Yet he did not tell the world of this great deed. He felt that the glory was not due to him but to his God. Therefore he was silent, not telling even his parents, but keeping the matter locked up in his bosom as a profound secret for many a day. Most men would have blown the trumpet loud and long, and used every means to get their names inserted in the roll of fame. If there were some degrading elements in this character there were also some that were truly ennobling. It was Christ-like to make little of the world's applause. After performing His mighty works, our Lord for the most part withdrew into a desert place, or retired to the mountain side, to spend the night in prayer to God—a beautiful index of the direction in which the needle of the heart pointed. Deep waters make the least noise. Samson probably talked of this matter to his God also, unseen by the world. (Compare Paul's keeping as a secret for fourteen years the greatest honour ever conferred on any man in this life as detailed in 2 Cor. xii. 1-12).

VI. God sometimes stores up comforts for His people where they would least expect to find them.

In that typical age every thing was full of instruction. There was a lesson in the discovery made so unexpectedly of honey in the carcass of the lion. After so hard a struggle, in which the Spirit of God came to his help, the result is a feast of honey! Honey is honey still, though found in the lion's carcass. In God's service "the bitter comes before the sweet," and that, says Bunyan, "makes the sweet the sweeter." Joseph's hard lines in being sold, and in leading a prison life for years, with all its privations and exhibitions of cold-heartedness from those around him, brought in the end a glorious vindication of character and improvement of circumstances. David's many and great trials furnished him with materials for writing his sweetest psalms, and made him the comforter and counsellor of God's people in every age. After encountering the fiercest opposition from the enemies of the truth at Antioch, the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. Some severe trials are made to turn men's dispositions into sweetness, and all features of excellence. That is honey out of the lion's carcass. "How precious are thy thoughts"—that is when taking a retrospect of God's way of leading us!

VII. The perils of the wicked's fellowship.

Samson now sat at a Philistine's board. There were suspicious glances all round the table. "When they saw him"—how strong and well-built, how formidable he might become were any dispute to arise, they set spies around him, consisting of thirty strong young men, to be a guard over him in case of any outbreak. That was a poor stockade of defence against a roused Samson; but the wicked's protection is always a mere wall of reeds. In the language of deceit, which might be said to be the vernacular of Philistine social circles, they called these young men "friends of the bridegroom." The company professed to be full of smiles, while their hearts were full of deadly thoughts. It was an easy transition to pass from the friendly query—"Art thou in health, brother?" to give a stab under the fifth rib. It was an atmosphere of treachery. Their farther conduct in stealing the solution of the riddle proposed, in extorting it from the terrified bride by threats, and in actually determining to burn her and her relatives with fire, showed some of the perils of the wicked's fellowship. But it was worse still when she, whom he was to take as the companion of his bosom, actually betrayed her husband behind his back, and did what, to an honourable mind like that of Samson, was the same as giving him a stab in the very heart. So it is with those who have no fear of God before their eyes.

VIII. The ways of deceit end to the injury of those who practise them

Samson did indeed act the part of honour in paying the forfeit to those who had nominally won it. But he took his own mode of fulfilling the conditions of the riddle. He paid the forfeit with Philistine blood and clothing (ver. 19). He virtually said, since you have unrighteously compelled me to pay, I shall do so at the expense of your own countrymen; and so begin the infliction of the heavy blows on your wicked race for their oppression of God's chosen people. Thus the ways of deceit recoil on those who walk in them (Ps. v. 6; x. 7-10; lii. 1-5).

CHAPTER XV.

Revenge Taken and Returned.

(Verses 1–20.)

Critical Notes.—1. Within a while after.] *After some time*, indefinitely; probably a few months. In the time of wheat harvest.] About the month of May. This is mentioned on account of what is referred to in ver. 5. With a kid.] A customary present (Gen. xxxviii. 17; Luke xv. 29). This was expressive of social good feeling, and was meant to be a means of reconciliation. This indicated a generous and honourable nature. He was willing to forgive and forget the past. Go into the chamber.] The woman's apartment.

2. I thought thou hadst utterly hated her.] No idea of marriage as a sacred vow made by the one party to the other; and no consideration of the fact that the marriage dowry had been paid. So loose and unprincipled were Philistine ideas. Take her younger sister.] This is worse than the bargain which the worldly Laban made with Jacob. For the marriage tie is broken with the elder sister in the most flippant manner. Where there is no God there is no conscience.

3. Concerning them] *i.e.*, the whole family circle and their friends immediately, but also the whole people of the Philistines.

Now shall I be blameless before the Philistines.] Or as regards the Philistines, if I do them an injury. The Philistines in the neighbourhood seemed generally to acquiesce in the treatment which had been given to Samson by his wife and father-in-law. It was the feeling of race that led to it. Thus Samson interpreted it; and against the race as such, his indignation was awakened accordingly. Besides, he was ever seeking occasion to harass the people as a whole, for that was his commission. It would be wrong to put down his severe reprisals on that people as altogether due to personal resentment or to mere patriotism. Along with that there always mingled the consciousness that he was bound, as a matter of duty, to avenge Israel upon them in the name of the God whom they dishonoured. The words he now used were almost a declaration of war.

4. Caught three hundred foxes] ***shualim*** (Heb.) or jackals. The Persian word is ***shagal***, which is not unlike *jackal*. Probably the fox and the jackal are two different species of the same genus The latter seems to be intended here, for the jackals go in troops, and frequent the vineyards. Their tails also look like red burning torches, or glowing coals. The species is the *canis aureus*. Samson fought his battles alone; of his people none were with him. He had not even 300 men like Gideon. He now therefore repairs to the beasts of the forest for assistance, and takes thirty jackals into his service. His former act in slaying the thirty men at Ashkelon did not create much sensation. But now, when he sets a large part of the country's harvest in flames, the whole nation is roused. He needed the animals, for he could not set whole miles of material on fire at once, and if the fire had begun only in one spot it might have been extinguished before it had gone far. But when 150 pairs are started at once of the swiftest-footed creatures, frightened at the fiery torches, and maddened with pain, and run like the wind through the half-withered grain, setting fire in all directions, alike to shocks and standing crops, and going even among the vineyards, it may be imagined how suddenly and how widely spread the conflagration would appear.

The creatures might be easily caught, for they usually herd together, and the word here "caught" means taken by ***snares*** or ***nets*** (Cant. ii. 13; Ps lxiii. 10; Amos iii. 5; Ps. xxxv. 8; Isa. viii. 14; Jer. xviii. 22). They would naturally run forward, and also run to cover, that is among the standing corn, for such is their nature—unlike dogs that run along the road. The fields being ripe were just in a state to catch fire. The bushy tails of the foxes would make it easy to get them tied together, and also to get the fire brand supported. It is to be remembered too, that there would be no interruption to the running of the jackals, for the fields were not enclosed by hedges, or walls of any kind, but extended over a vast surface continuously for twenty or thirty miles. The whole country had the appearance of one vast cornfield.

6. Burnt her and her father with fire.] This was returning revenge on the authors of the provocation, which led to the revenge that Samson took. The object was, not to do justice to Samson (they were little in the mood of thinking of that), nor yet to be revenged on him by destroying his relatives, but it was to make a retaliation on those who had raised the strife, and so had brought down on them a terrible calamity. They were enraged, and wished to make way for their anger somewhere, but being afraid to attack the mighty Samson, they cowardly made it burst on the weaker party. Burning was, among the Jews, the punishment inflicted for adultery and sins of impurity (Gen. xxxviii. 24; Lev. xx. 14; xxi. 9). Thus the fate which Samson's wife wished to avoid by proving false to her husband, now at last comes down on her head. They probably enclosed her father with the whole family in the building, and then set fire to it, allowing none to escape.

7. Though ye have done this, etc.] Meaning: Since you have chosen to act thus, I will not cease till I have fully avenged myself on you. He felt that such barbarity, shown to those whom he was bound to protect, quite justified him in making strong reprisals.

8. Smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter.] *i.e.*, those who had done the cruel act which roused his indignation. The phrase, "hip and thigh," is proverbial (שׁוֹק עַל יָרֵךְ) *thigh upon hip* or *shank on thigh*. These are the parts of a man where his chief strength in opposing a foe lies, and these were smashed, or broken. The sense is, he inflicted a most thorough and crushing defeat.

Went down and dwelt on the top of the rock Etam.] Rather, the *cleft* of the rock. The rocks of Palestine were famous for their fissures and cavities suitable as temporary dwelling places, or refuges in troublous times. Perhaps he felt himself no longer safe in Zorah, or he did not wish to bring trouble on his father's house; therefore he retired, to "wander in the dens and caves of the earth," making his God his dwelling place as well as his buckler and shield. For very probably he wished to go "apart into a desert place and rest awhile," to reflect on the tragic hours of the past and gird himself anew, by prayer and meditation, for the stern work before him in the future. The name Etam has a rough signification—"wild beasts' lair,"

"yet not altogether unsuitable for the lion slayer and jackal conqueror." It may be the same with the Etam, in 1 Chron. iv. 32. Rocks as refuges are often referred to in scripture (Isa. ii. 21; 1 Sam. xiii. 6; xxiii. 19; Jud. vi. 2; Heb. xi. 38; Ps. lxi. 2).

9. Pitched in Judah.] A presumption that Etam was in Judah. The blow which the hero had inflicted on them told. It was unsafe that such an enemy should be allowed to go at large. But after their dire experience they feared to attack him directly. To his own countrymen, however, he might readily capitulate, and, knowing their spiritless condition, these craven Philistines thought that, by opposing the weak, they might be able to bind the strong.

11. Three thousand of the men of Judah went down to the rock of Etam.] This is one of the meanest and most cowardly passages that is recorded in the miserable history of the days of the Judges. Such a people deserved the heavy yoke that lay upon them. A golden opportunity had occurred. One single arm had all but set them free. They had but to rally round the champion that had appeared, and there was a moral certainty that the star of liberty would again be in the zenith. But they tamely submit as hacks to the oppressor. Where the Philistines' power over them might have been broken for ever, they pusillanimously do their bidding to go and bind the man who had fought so nobly to set them free! Could base servility farther go? The loss of a great battle were a less melancholy sight than this spectacle of a nation that had lost its self respect and had given up hope for the future!

Knowest thou not, etc.] Right-minded men would have fallen to the ground with shame at using such words—to have accused their greatest benefactor, as if he had been guilty of doing wrong in striking a blow for their liberties at the risk of his life—and also to have shown a preference for hugging their chains, and submitting to despotic tyranny, rather than rallying round their benefactor and gaining an easy deliverance from bondage. "But their heart was lost in idolatry. No one can raise himself to freedom who has not first repented—for penitence is courage against self, and confession before others—and among the 3000 there were not three who did not still bend to Baal."—(*Cassell*). (See this servile spirit referred to in *Sam. Agonist*). It was a thankless task to restore such a people to independence.

12. We are come down to bind thee, etc.] So these abject tools of the uncircumcised had the effrontery to tell their Heaven-provided saviour (comp. Acts vii. 25; and John vii. 5). Truly they were trying to purchase peace at a costly price. "How ntly might he have said to them, as Themistocles once did to the Athenians, 'Are ye weary of receiving so many benefits by one man?'" (*Trapp*). His submitting to be bound was one of the noblest acts of his life. It was moral greatness bowing to the request of moral meanness. He is a lion before the Philistines, but a lamb when dealing with the men of Judah.

14. When he came to Lehi the Philistines shouted, etc.] Strongly pinioned with new cords, the strongest they could find, the men of Judah, lost to all sense of shame, drag their hero forward, and deliver him into the enemy's hand. The customary shout of triumph over a fallen foe arises (1 Sam. xvii. 52), but it awakens the lion-power that slumbered in that mighty arm. Instantly the cords become as flax that feels the touch of fire, and his fetters drop from his hand. "The Spirit of the Lord comes mightily upon him," and now for destruction to those who had defied the God of Israel! With the weight of an avalanche he falls on their masses, crushing and felling them to the ground, while they are paralysed with terror, and have neither power to fight nor to flee. Any weapon will suit the hand, when there is such force of purpose. The jawbone of an ass recently fallen is that which comes first to hand. This he seizes, and if it had been the sword of Michael, it could hardly have done deadlier execution. They are mowed down in crowds, as the grass goes down before the sickle. In an incredibly short space of time, a thousand men fall to the ground never more to rise; while the victor exclaims—

With the jawbone of an ass,
Heaps upon heaps
(One heap, two heaps),
With the jawbone of an ass
I have felled a thousand men.

(1 Sam. xviii. 7), (Deut. xxxii. 30).

17. Ramath-Lechi.] The hill of the jawbone.

18. He called on the Lord.] Samson was a man that went to God with his difficulties, and sought relief by prayer.

He was sore athirst.] Being summer weather, and therefore very hot. He was exhausted also from the long continuance of the conflict (2 Sam. xxiii. 10).

Thou has given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant.] He here notices 4 things (1.) *Thou* has done it, not his own strong arm. (2.) It is a *great* deliverance. Samson was in

a critical situation, when bound with those cords, and hosts of enemies all around him. Besides it was the deliverance of God's name from dishonour. For it might be read—"deliverance by the hand of, etc." (3.) He owns himself *God's servant*, as the "saviour" of His people. (4.) He acknowledges himself as *liable to perish* in the midst of victory—to die of thirst. He prays thus all alone, for he is deserted by the men of Judah. Every one of the poltroons betakes himself to flight, though their deliverance was now more assured than ever if they would only follow the leader God had sent them; they skulk every one of them behind backs, and leave Samson to do as he best can for himself (Ps. cxxiv).

19. God clave a hollow that was in the jaw, etc.] not the jaw of the ass, but the *place* Lehi—rather *Lechi*. The Hebrew word *Maktesh*, the Rabbins say, means the socket of the ass's tooth, in which the tooth is fixed; but the spring is said still to exist for a long period—"it is in Lechi unto this day." The reference then must be to the *place* called Lechi. God made a hollow at that place, and a spring to issue from it, just as was done at Horeb and Kadesh (Ex. xvii. 6; Num. xx. 8, 11). The name given to the spring was Enhakkore, which signifies, *the well of him that cried*, which is at Lechi. This spring was known as Samson's spring, even in the time of Jerome and others in the 7th, 12th, and 14th centuries. The name *Maktesh* (mortar) is mentioned as a place in Zeph. i. 11.

20. Samson judged 20 years.] Some think that now, after this great exploit, he began to be acknowledged as judge [*Trapp*], for he was yet young. The larger part of the twenty years is passed over in silence. It is only when nearing the termination of his course, that we again hear of him in ch. xvi.

HOMILETIC REMARKS.—Verses 1-20.

Human Passion and Divine Purposes.

I. The treachery of the wicked's companionship.

Though filled with anger at the moment, Samson was not wanting in the principle of fidelity to engagements. It may have been due in part to his attachment to her whom he had selected to be his wife, but also, in part, we think, to his sense of the obligation under which he had come, that after his anger was over he wished to have a reconciliation. On his side, there was the working of conscience, as well as natural affection. He soon found there was no such feeling on the other side. Where there is no fear of the true God there is no sense of responsibility, and consequently no binding moral principle. The foundation for good morality does not exist, and no confidence can be entertained in any kind of dealing. A man no longer does a thing because it is right to be done, but only acts from self interest or from convenience. Thus every thing becomes loose, and the very idea of moral obligation becomes lost. To keep faith, even in so binding a case as the marriage contract, was a thing which had no place in a Philistine bosom. And so the covenant between Samson and his wife was put aside without ceremony the moment that he turned his back, both father and daughter taking it very easily. The companion of the bridegroom being agreed himself to stand as the bridegroom, the daughter was given to him to be his wife, and Samson was forgotten. Examples of treachery—Laban (Gen. xxix. 23), and Gen. xxxi. 41)—Saul (1 Sam. xxv. 44)—Joab (2 Sam. iii. 27; xx. 9, 10)—Absalom (2 Sam. xvi. 13)—Judas (Matt. xxvi. 13).

II. God's mercy is sometimes seen in preventing our wishes from being carried out.

Apart from the sinful character of the act, it was a great folly for an Israelite to wed with a Philistine. It was laying the foundation for perpetual discord and vexation. For soon, in this case, would the bridegroom have discovered that he had taken a viper to his bosom. Nothing could have gone on satisfactorily in such a household. "What concord hath Christ with

Belial? What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" Samson was indeed storing up misery for himself all the days of his natural life. Simply on the score of looking after his own domestic interests, he could not have taken a step more destructive of all home-peace and comfort than to have formed a connection so utterly incongruous, and so certain to poison every spring of happiness. It was "a thorn in the flesh" which only death could extract.

But God saved him from his infatuation. The means employed seemed to him to be a series of disasters, but they delivered him in the end from disasters tenfold greater. And so it is in all God's dealings with His people in this world. As a father, who is wise in his kindness, He oftentimes refuses to give that which they passionately covet, or seem to be justly entitled to, because in the long run it would be to them serious injury (Mark x. 35–45). Moses earnestly wished to get his people delivered from slavery, but it was not God's time; and he had to flee for his own life (Ex. ii. 11–15). Joseph, no doubt, was delighted to continue in his father's house, and felt it the greatest misery to lose his indulgent parental kindness; but God saw something better for him in the future, though the way by which he was led seemed to Joseph the reverse of kind (Gen. xl. 14, 15; Ps. cv. 18). Yet every step of the way was right, for it was necessary to wean him from the character of being a petted child, and lead him to acquire the sterner virtues which adversity alone can teach. We still are ever striving after an easier life, where there would be fewer sacrifices to make, less of what is disagreeable to flesh and blood, and more of the good things of this world put into our cup. But our Heavenly Father says it must not be. Not from indifference to our interests, but in mercy to our real well-being, He prevents our wishes from being carried out; and so He defeats our plans and disappoints our expectations. He saves us from ourselves.

III. Revenge is at once a mistake and a sin.

It is an evil omen that there should be such a ready tendency in the human heart to retaliation and revenge. We see it in the case of Samson, as well as in the Philistines. The shameful treatment he had received awakened in him a purpose of revenge against the whole tribe. For by words, looks, whispers and inuendos, it seemed as if there were a general plotting against him, so that he felt the ground was not safe under his feet. While he stood alone, receiving scandalous treatment on the one side, they were instinctively drawing together in conspiracy against him on the other. Filled with the spirit of revenge, he resolved to make reprisals on the whole class, and accordingly used means to destroy the whole year's produce of food, for many miles round the district where he then was.

This was wrong; for it is always wrong to cherish any unhallowed passion in the bosom. We are expressly required to "put off all anger, wrath, and malice." These feelings are excited within us by the wicked one, whereas the Spirit of Christ requires us "to pray for them that despitefully use us." It is also an express command that we are "not to avenge ourselves," but to leave that work in the hand of God—that we are rather to pursue the course of "overcoming evil with good."

This contest was also *unwise*. It was sure to provoke retaliation. The community were roused to indignation, and with burning hearts inquired for the perpetrator. The story was soon told. But they were afraid to touch the person of him who had done them so grievous an injury, and therefore they vented their fury against those who had goaded him on to do it. The faithless wife and her father they burned with fire. This act anew kindled the flames of resentment in the breast of Samson, and furnished a justification for a new

slaughter. "He smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter." Cromwell in like manner said of the enemy before his Ironsides, "God gave them as stubble to our swords." So it was now; he mowed them down as the grass. "They perished as the fat of lambs."

The spirit of revenge is against the whole character of Christianity. "I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves." We are "not to allow the sun to go down upon our wrath." "Anger resteth in the bosom of fools." "Forgive not till seven times, but until seventy times seven." We are to put off "hatred, variance, emulations, strife, seditions, envyings" and to put on "goodness, gentleness, meekness." We are indeed "not to render railing for railing." We are to "give no offence, neither to the Jews nor the Gentiles, nor to the church of God," and "if it be possible, as much as lieth in us, we are to live peaceably with all men." "When a quarrel is begun, in the progress of the contention, there soon come to be faults on both sides, evil surmisings, undue animosities, mutual reflections, indecent sallies of passion, and scandals multiplied, and the name of God is blasphemed." [*Evans.*]

IV. Men's sins are often overruled to fulfil the holy purposes of God.

Samson was again and again roused to take revenge on the enemies of his people on account of their detestable conduct. But revenge is an unholy feeling, and cannot be approved of by the Holy One of Israel. Yet that appears to have been the principal motive that urged him on in almost every one of his memorable deeds. These deeds were notwithstanding made use of to accomplish the high purposes of the God of Israel in punishing the oppressors of His people. Samson himself seemed to realize this and felt that he was justified in proceeding so often against the enemies of his people and his God, because they were really marked out for doom, and he was the appointed executioner of that doom. Thus there was ever a mixture of motives in all that Samson did. He was constantly giving way to unhallowed passion, while God was ever making use of him to glorify Himself by bringing His people nearer to deliverance.

So it ever is more or less, all through the history of this troubled and sinful world. God is ever "making use of the wrath of man to praise Him." He makes use of one wicked ruler to be a scourge to another, "though he means it not so, neither in his heart doth he think so." For many centuries has God allowed the history of mankind so to proceed; the wicked actions of individuals and of nations being employed contrary to men's intentions or wishes, to serve the high and holy purposes of Heaven.

V. God's wonderful forbearance in saving His people from their infatuation.

We have noticed above the mournful apathy into which the men of Judah had sunk, that, though a golden opportunity was set before them, they had not the heart to strike a blow for their deliverance from the yoke of the oppressor. On the contrary, they seem so much in love with their chains, that they find fault with their Liberator, when he sets before them an open door, and bids them go free. They sell their champion to secure a false peace with the enemy. To such a depth of baseness do those sink who have cast off their God! They had become "sottish children, a people of no understanding." "They were stricken but they did not grieve, they were consumed but they refused to receive correction." "They had a revolting and a rebellious heart." They were not only absolutely helpless in themselves, but they had become objects of loathing to those who would try to lift them up.

Yet amid this extreme provocation, God had compassion on them, and sent a deliverer to fight their battle singlehanded, not only unaided by a single man of them, but even in the face of their base treachery to himself! And why? "For My name's sake will I defer mine anger." "I had pity for Mine holy name. I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for Mine holy name's sake. I will sanctify My great name" (Isa. xlviii. 9; Ezek. xxxvi. 21-23). How many still will rather "lie down in their shame" than seek either cleansing or elevation! They will not submit to the trouble and sacrifice necessary for their purification. How many lose their souls, because they dread anything like a spiritual cataclysm taking place, in order to their passing from death into life? And even God's own people have their sanctification greatly retarded, because while they *cannot* carry on that work without God, He *will* not carry it on without them (Phil. ii. 12, 13).

"God's most wonderful attribute is His patience." His interference at all for the redemption of such a people as this was owing to these causes—(1.) *To illustrate by a strong case how far His mercy could go.* (2.) *He had respect to His covenant*, made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their seed for ever (Gen. xvii. 7; xxvi. 3, 4; xxviii. 13, 14. (3.) He was *moved in answer to prayer.* For there still was a handful of believing people left in the land, who "kept not silence and gave him no rest, etc." (4.) He wished to *preserve to Himself a people on the earth*—Apply this principle to the spiritual Israel.

VI. To be crushed with oppression is unfavourable to the development of pious principle.

This is but another side of the same facts, but one which must not be overlooked. The men of Judah being so near to the country of the Philistines were more harassed than the other tribes. Having been for several years under the heel of the oppressor, they had lost all heart, their spirit was broken, and they had sunk into despair. They had become demoralised. Their power of resistance was gone, and they submitted like sheep to their fate. Even Samson's noble deeds awakened no patriotism in their hearts, nor fired them with any impulse of gratitude. Theirs was "the sorrow that worketh death." A parallel case of heart breaking under bondage we have in Ex. vi. 9.

Nor is it at any time other than a disadvantage for the cultivation of a man's religion, that he should be heart-broken with adversity. "Oppression makes a wise man mad." When the spirit is crushed out of him, it makes him callous, and dead to all the better feelings of his nature. It will not do to break the mainspring. Christianity indeed exerts a recuperative and counterbalancing influence under any circumstances, but only when faith is called into exercise. Then, indeed, "when troubles abound, consolations do more abound," and it is possible even to "glory in tribulations." But we must not lose hope, and allow ourselves to be drifted passively with the tide. Duty is not to be performed mechanically, and without spirit, but always with trust in God, that He will "make all things work together for our good." To be even sorely afflicted is often a most healthful discipline, and is made use of to teach some of the best lessons of Christian training, but it must always be on the basis of a strong and healthy exercise of faith (Ezek. xxxvii. 11; Isa. xl. 27-31; Ps. lxxvii. 7-9; xlii. 5, 11; Job xxiii. 8-10; Ps. cxliii. 3-8).

VII. The Destroyer of the Church's enemies is yet the mildest of friends to his own people.

It would have been alike easy for Samson to have smitten the men of Judah, as well as his Philistine foes. But they were his countrymen, and they were

God's chosen people. He both felt that, he must not lift a finger against the Lord's anointed, and also his heart was too much in sympathy with his down-trodden country-men to think of hurting a hair of their heads, however much he might abhor their conduct. So did a greater and a truer than Samson feel, when He looked on the burdens, and heard the groanings of those dear to Him as the apple of His eye. Though they listened not to the message sent, He still went on with the work of deliverance (Isa. lxiii. 7–9). "Though I make an end of other nations, yet not of thee" etc. (Jer. xxx. 11; Zeph. iii. 17: Ps. xci. 11–13; Matt. xiii. 30, 41–43; 2 Thess. i. 6–10).

VIII. The cruel intentions of the wicked often lead to their own greater punishment.

Samson's enemies intended first to bind him, then to torture him, and finally to put him to a cruel death. This we may suppose, because when he did fall into their hands, that was what they actually did. But it turned out to them according to the adage—"evil be to them that evil think." They got their enemy into their hands, and got him fast bound, while their hearts were full of all manner of malicious thoughts against him. But they forgot that mysterious force that gathered round him direct from his God, which, in a moment unloosed his fetters, and left his enemies defenceless, and caught in the very act of meditating vengeance. With their guilt staring them in the face, they fell before him in heaps, and a greater carnage took place among their ranks than had ever yet been known (Ps. lviii. 7, cxviii. 12).

Those whom God sends to do any special work for Him have, on that very account, a sacred character, so that any injury done to their persons He counts as done to Himself (Num. xii. 8). It is the same with those whom God chooses to represent him before the world, whether it be a numerous people, or only a handful. They are under the Divine protection, and woe be to those who rough handle the people on whom the jealous God sets His seal! If they sin, and sin heinously against Him, that is a matter for dealing between Him and them; but so long as He does not cast them off, all around are warned to respect His sacred mark upon them. "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye" (Zech. ii. 8; i. 14, 15; Ps. cv. 14, 15). Hence the many retributions with which God in His Providence visited the nations, who, from time to time, meditated evil against Israel (Ezek. xxvi. 2–4; xxxvi. 1–12; Jer. xxxi. 5, 6, 10, 11, 24; 35, 49; l. 17–20, 33, 34). And now the Philistines are so visited. The massacre that took place on this occasion, was really a vindicating of God's great name against those who trod in the dust the people that were so dear to Him. It is indeed a fulfilling of what He has said should take place (Ps. xxxiv. 21; xxxvii. 12–14; xxxiv. 7). The issue which these men of blood were preparing for God's servant came to themselves (Ps. vii. 15, 16). The triumph of the wicked is short.

IX. When God is helping us, the meanest weapon will overcome opposition.

When we are really doing a work for God, either to speak a word for His honour, or perform an act, or fulfil a commission, He will not "send us a warfare on our own charges." He will always, on the spot, and at the moment, find means to serve our purpose—the right word to be spoken, a suitable weapon to employ, or free scope for the discharge of duty. The rudest instrument will suffice to do great things when God's hand is engaged. "The victory lies not in the weapon, nor in the arm, but in the Spirit of God who wields the weapon in the arm. O God! if the means be weak Thou art

strong!" By the mouth of a fisherman—a man taken at random, we might almost say, at any rate without any care to use the naturally best qualified human instrument—a greater result was achieved on the day of Pentecost, than on any day of the whole course of the Samsonian career. And through similar instruments, entirely wanting in human wisdom and human eloquence, within a few years, the strongest fastnesses of Satan's kingdom in this world were shaken, and every throne was made to totter to the fall.

It is the old story of the blowing with rams' horns, and the strong walls of Jericho fell down flat. David, the stripling, killed Goliath the giant with a sling and a stone. Moses brought the ten mighty plagues on Egypt through the stretching forth of the shepherd's rod. And the mightiest throne ever erected in this world, that on which the Prince of Darkness sits, received an irrecoverable blow from the use of the most despicable of all weapons—a cross! (Col. ii. 15). Sometimes the plainest truth, stated in the boldest form, by an uncultured person, pierces through armour of triple brass with irresistible effect. The honest, unpretending spirit in which a thing is said, tells more mightily on the heart and conscience than all the decorations of language, or all the logic of the schools. The real source of the power that belongs to the gospel of Christ lies partly in the peculiar character of the truth contained in that gospel, and partly in the presence of the living Spirit of God going along with that truth to make it effectual (Zech. iv. 6; Hag. ii. 5; Mark xvi. 20; Acts ii. 47; John xvi. 14; 1 Cor. ii. 4; 1 Thess. i. 5; Ps. viii. 2). God puts the treasure into an "earthen vessel" (2 Cor. iv. 7). Better serve Him with the jaw of an ass than not serve Him at all.

X. The strongest as well as the weakest are dependent on faith and prayer.

Samson, with all his herculean powers, was yet dependent on the ordinary laws of nature like other men. Great and continued exertion in a warm atmosphere led to the miseries of thirst, and these on this occasion were so great as to endanger life. Precipitately, he fell from a state of superhuman strength to a state of absolute weakness, so much so, that he felt as if the gift of life itself were about to be taken away. Earnestly he cried unto the Lord, and confessed his dependence as if he had been the weakest man in Israel. He had the witness in himself that the power he exercised was not his own, but a talent given him to occupy for his Lord. It served the purpose of a "thorn in the flesh," to have this great thirst, for it prevented his being "exalted above measure." Now, all his thoughts are of prayer and of faith. It is believing prayer. This implies: (1.) Trust in God as *his own God*. Were God his enemy he could not trust Him. He was his father's God. He himself had been the child of a godly upbringing, and had made choice of Jehovah in preference to all the gods of the heathen. He was reconciled to God, and amid all its oscillations his heart still clave to Him. (2.) Trust in Him as *the God of the promises*. The all-inclusive promise, "I will be a God to thee"—was sure to every true-hearted Israelite. Also such individual promises as, "I will not fail thee"—"I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest"—"as thy days so shall thy strength be," etc. (3.) Trust in Him *on account of past help*. Often had the Spirit of God come mightily upon him, and through Him great deeds had been done. It was a proof that God was with him. Having begun to bless, he would continue to bless. For "His gifts and calling are without any change of purpose" (Rom. xi. 29; Ps. cxv. 12). And now, on this occasion, he had obtained the most signal of all the proofs of the Divine favour. (4.) It was *in God's service that he came by his weakness*. God has engaged to uphold His servant whom He may call to do His work (Isa. xlii. 1; xli. 9, 10,

13–15; 2 Cor. i. 8–10). The men of faith "out of weakness were made strong" (1 Kings xix. 4–18). (5.) To *preserve the honour of God's name* is the argument he pleads. Let it not be said, that God would allow His servant to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised. The glory of the triumph was altogether due to God, and if His servant should fall while engaged in the work, it would take away from the perfection of the triumph. Gideon and his 300 men, though "faint," were yet enabled "to pursue," till their work was done, and not a man was lost. Nor do we hear of any loss among Barak's 10,000 men. "The Lord is a rock, and His work is perfect."

XI. God will not fail the man of prayer.

Samson's cry was heard. He had very likely continued for some time in prayer, and, what is recorded in a single verse is simply the substance of the prayer, as is the usual manner of the Scripture record. The prayer was answered speedily, for that was necessary, if it should be answered at all. It seemed consistent, that when God had given him His Spirit to enable him to conquer the Philistine, He should also "continue His loving kindness," by granting that supply of water in a dry place, which was needed for the preservation of his life. That was given miraculously, by the opening of a fountain where none naturally existed, in Lechi—the *place* so called, not in the *jaw* itself—and a spring issued from it as in the rock at Horeb (Isa. xli. 17, 18). "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" In the Book of Psalms is any class of the testimonies of Christian experience more frequent than this—that God always, sooner or later, heard the believing prayer of the writer? Why does He take to Himself the name of the "God of Jacob," but because He loves the man of prayer and delights to hear his cry (Isa. xlv. 19, Ps. xxxiv. 4–6, 15, 17; xx. 1). He has already given up His own Son for such an one, and that gift being received, the receiver is henceforth a sacred object in the eye of the giver, so that no measure of blessing is reckoned too high to bestow on one, who is so intimately allied to the Son of God. Hence the great liberty which such an one may use in prayer. Also the gift of Christ when received opens the way for the bestowment of all other blessings. Every possible obstacle to the outflow of Divine blessing is removed, so that now it is most glorifying to God to answer prayer. A sinful man, though in himself an object of abhorrence to God, yet receiving Christ as God's gift, becomes one with Him, and is "accepted in the Beloved." It is then a righteous thing to bestow on him all manner of blessing for Christ's sake.

XII. Great deliverances should ever be gratefully remembered.

It is singular how any should depreciate Samson at this point, by saying that he showed no gratitude for the mercy that was exhibited to him. "He erected," they say, "no altar, he offered no sacrifice, but forgetful of praise and thanksgiving, and assuming the honour of the conquest to himself, he chanted a hymn of victory and a poem of praise to himself, and consecrated the place to his own name." True, Noah built an altar and offered sacrifices after escaping from the waters of the flood—a most appropriate thing to do, for the occasion was that of a heavy visitation of the Divine wrath on account of sin. Jacob at Bethel erected no altar, but he set up a pillar, and he made a vow, which showed his deep sense of obligation for benefits conferred; and this too was appropriate. Abraham, after being spared the sacrifice of his son, gave a significant name to the place, and this was all he did by way of commemoration. For the sacrifice of the ram on the altar had nothing to do with a testimony of thanksgiving or commemoration. So it was with Hagar (Gen. xvi. 13, 14), with Samuel (1 Sam. vii. 12), with Jacob repeatedly (Gen. xxxii. 2, 30).

In like manner, Samson expressed the gratitude of his heart, by giving to the place of his deliverance the expressive name of Enhakkore—meaning, the spring of him who cried in earnest prayer to God and was heard. Who can doubt that here there was both thanksgiving and commemoration? How many new names of consecration have we given to certain spots in our earthly pilgrimage which have been to us as the house of God and the gate of heaven. Can we recall a turn of the road, where it seemed as if the angels of God met us, and we were comforted and cheered beyond expression—far more than compensated for the hard, gloomy, scowling countenances of many a Laban or Esau that we had to meet with in our wanderings? Can we call to mind some remarkable answer given to earnest wrestling prayer, by which we obtained deliverance from some threatened danger that we thought it impossible to survive? Or can we remember some season of Divine communion, when our thoughts and feelings were raised far above the world, when we were alone with God, and felt strongly the hallowing influence of His presence, and when Jesus talked with us by the way and opened up the scriptures—when, indeed, the atmosphere around us was so pure, that it seemed as if all sin had already disappeared, and we were ready to fly in through the gates of the holy world, where Jesus reigns? These are cases that call for the soul's best tribute of thanksgiving, and most sacred names of commemoration. It is the instinct of a truly pious heart to take steps that they shall not be forgotten. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." (Ps. lxxvii. 11, 12; cxlv. 1, 2; cxix. 16, 93; Isa. lxiii. 7). God Himself requires that we should remember His gracious providences and dealings with us (Gen. xxxv. 1; Deut. vi. 6-9). In many places He calls upon us to "remember His marvellous works," and to praise His name for ever. The most touching of all memories is "The Lord's supper."

The name which Samson gave to the spring that was specially opened to give him drink, so far from being the taking of praise to himself, we interpret to mean the very opposite. The fit paraphase of that name is given in Ps. xxxiv. 6.

XIII. All power is really at the back of the good, while the wicked live only on sufferance.

At first sight it seems quite the reverse. These Philistines, like an overrunning flood, swept over the land, and there was no breakwater to stem the torrent. The God of Israel seemed to have left His heritage and given up the dearly beloved of His soul into the hands of her enemies. But, in a manner unthought of, the breakwater at last appeared. A single man became more powerful than a whole nation, leaving us to infer that a nation of such men could be more powerful than all the nations of the earth. The whole power of the wicked is usurped power; it does not stand on right but on sufferance, and it is liable at any moment, by a word from the throne, to be taken away. It is the power that belongs to rebels and outlaws, and cannot last (Ps. xxxvii. 9, 10, 12–15, 35, 36). But the righteous are the children of the kingdom, and by right all things are theirs which belong to their Divine Father. The whole force of the Eternal Law is on their side (Deut. xxxiii. 27; Ps. xc.; Isa. xxxiii. 16).

XIV. It is but little of a man's life that is told to future ages.

Samson had a public life of twenty years, and the whole government, legislative and executive, rested with him alone, without any to share the power. The legislative indeed God reserved entirely to Himself, though of that there was

but little in a time of such extreme disorder. One man stood out as the sole figure in the history of all Israel, and he alone made that history for so long a time. Yet how little is told of him! Mere snatches—half an hour's reading—some nine or ten stories, and these told in the curtest possible manner, and then—he passes off the stage! The prolonged story of his thoughts, words, and actions, which was every day being told for the long period of twenty years, and which was known in part, only to his fellows, in full, only to himself, was never heard by the generations that followed!—and yet these fragmentary hints about the most remarkable life of that age, are more than what is heard of about the whole nation of Israel (Job. xiv. 2, 3, 10; Ps. cxliv. 3, 4). How many are constantly sinking into oblivion, their names never more to come up to notice till the great day of account? And then "many that sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." There is no real immortality, but that which Christ gives (John x. 28; Matt. xiii. 43; xxv. 34). How supremely foolish it is, to live now in such a manner as that we shall deserve to be forgotten for ever! How unwise to be filling up a large part of our time, or the whole of it, with materials that must be scattered like chaff before the winds of trial!

CHAPTER XVI.

(Verses 1–31.)

Samson's Fall, Captivity and Death.

Critical Notes.—1, Then.] *And*—without fixing the time. A long gap stands between the events of the two previous chapters and those of the present one. Those refer to the early public life of the hero, afterwards many stirring events may have taken place which are not recorded, and now we have (certainly from ver. 4) in this chapter an account of the closing scene. We are to understand him as reappearing after a term of silence, but not inactivity, as Israel's "saviour," the same in his strength and in his weakness, and more than ever the terror of the Philistines, and a check on their oppression of Israel. Went to Gaza.] It is not said he went by a call from God (comp. chap. xiv. 4). Nor does it appear to have been on account of any previous relations he had to Gaza, for his being there was something of a novelty, being the town farthest removed of any from his usual home at Zorah. Probably, his reason for going was the same with that which took him to Timnath namely to discharge his duty as a scourge of the Philistines, by mingling with them and waiting opportunities to do as God might direct him. The word "*Gaza*," or "*Azzah*," means *the strong, fortified city*. It was the most powerful border-city, and the capital of the Philistines; one of the few places where some of the giants remained (Josh xi. 22). The hero was not afraid to go into this stronghold of the enemy. Already they had often measured swords, and it was clear that his single arm was more than a match for the whole uncircumcised race around him.

We wish we could draw a veil over what follows, both in verse 1 and verses 4-20, where we find flagrant breaches of God's holy commandment, as given in the seventh word of the Decalogue. But we must accept the record. Scripture is faithful in drawing the exact character as it stands, and we must take what is given without attempting either to soften or to magnify the features. The word *zonah*, here translated *harlot*, some would interpret to mean "a female innkeeper," the keeper of a general lodging house where strangers might be accommodated, and so they render it in Rahab's case (Josh ii. 1), for the spies simply wished accommodation for the night. But the truth is, the *zonah* in those corrupt communities, acted both in the one character and the other; and in the present case it is the evil sense that must be taken from the last clause of the verse. What a pity that this unsuspecting Israelite had not Job's example before him! (Job xxxi. 1).

Two things are to be noticed (1.) He did not come to Gaza to see this person. He did not know of her existence until he entered the city, but seeing her, he was attracted. (2.) He does not seem to have been habitually licentious, but being impulsive and ardent in temperament, he the more readily fell before temptation.

2. **They compassed him in.**] By patrols, and liers in wait. They were afraid to attack him directly, and they felt they must all do it together with united strength. The gates especially were securely locked and barred, while sentinels were placed over them, and then they remained quiet all the night, purposing in the morning to kill him. Why this purpose was not carried out at once is strange, for it was as easy to do so at night as in the morning. But they were nervous about the task, and put it off till morning should dawn.

3. **Samson arose at midnight, etc.**] He had come to know what was going on without, probably from his hostess, or as the poet suggests—

> "He heard a whispering, and the trampling feet
> Of people passing in the silent street."

Impulsive and high spirited as he always was, he felt indignant that an attempt should be made to confine him within either walls or gates. He therefore resolved to show the futility of such schemes. Proceeding to the gate, where the watchers were either asleep or glad to skulk out of the way as they saw him approach, he firmly grasped the doors, or folding wings of the city gate along with the two posts, tore them out of the ground with his herculean strength, with the cross-bar on them, put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of a mountain that is before Hebron. Instead of forcing the door open he tore up the posts by the roots, with the barred doors attached to them (comp. the shutting of the gate, the town wall, etc., in Josh. ii. 5, 7, 15). Gaza was then a walled town—it is not so now. He put the whole mass on his back and "carried it up to the top of a hill that is before Hebron." Some read it, to *a hill in the chain that runs up to Hebron.* For Hebron was at a distance of ten miles or more from Gaza, and much too far to carry such a load. It might be rendered—*that looketh towards Hebron*—and not a few name *El Montar* as the place in question, which is only forty minutes' distance from Gaza on the road to Hebron.

Hebron is mentioned for the special reason, that it was a centre or rallying point in the tribe of Judah. Samson's practical jest meant much more than the assertion of his own personal liberty. It implied the greatest dishonour that could be inflicted on any town of the enemy, for its mastery was symbolised by its gates (Gen. xxii. 17; xxiv. 60), and on this occasion to have the gates of the chief city of the Philistines brought even within sight of the central town of Judah was to imply the humiliation of subjection to Judah.

4. **He loved a woman in the valley of Sorek.**] A place supposed to be near to Zorah or Eshtaol, but in the land of the Philistines. It is a pity he had not got married into one of the families of Israel, for thereby much temptation would have been removed, his character stood high, many miseries been avoided, and his days been prolonged. He was still young, or scarcely up to middle life, and had time and strength to complete the redemption of his people but for his sin and folly, which brought him to an untimely end. Delilah] the *weak* or *languishing* one; but some make it the *weakening*, or *debilitating* one. In either case the name is appropriate, as names in those times were intended to be. Sorek, for example, signifies *vineyard*, for that was the character of the whole district. And it is called the valley (Heb. *nachal*) of Sorek, for valleys were noted for their fertility.

5. **Entice him and see wherein his great strength lies.**] "They knew already where his weakness lay, though not his strength." Such strength had never been heard of, not even in the country of giants. Yet Samson was no Cyclops. He was not a man of preternatural size, of towering height, and abnormal strength of bone and muscle; or, if to some extent so, it was not such in appearance as to account for the extraordinary feats which he performed. This led them to suppose, that he carried about with him some amulet or charm, and that if that could be taken from him, he would then become weak and be as another man. Hence these princes consulted together, and agreed to offer a large bribe to the woman who had acquired a great influence over him, that she might find out the secret of his power. The sum mentioned was eleven hundred pieces of silver (shekels probably) amounting in all to over £600—a much greater sum then than the same amount would be now. The person who gained it might be said to be affluent.

7. **If they bind me with seven green withs, etc.**] Allured by the prospect of so much wealth, this false-hearted woman begins to try her arts. Her request in ver. 6 probably states only the object she had in view, but not the actual manner in which she addressed her friend. She would bring it before him in the way of playful toying, as if she never meant to be serious, and yet as if she wished her woman's curiosity to be gratified. And he seems to have responded in the same half serious, half jocular mood. The "withs" refer to *strings*, perhaps bow-strings, or strings made of catgut (Ps. xi. 2). It might be tendrils, the tough fibres of trees, or pliable twisted rods. These are stronger than common ropes. It is common in some places to tie the legs of wild elephants and buffaloes newly caught with bonds of this sort. But the Septuagint supposes these bonds to be made of the sinews of cattle.

9. Men lying in wait, etc.] Spies; men ready to fall on Samson, the moment that his weakness was discovered. Not in the *same* chamber, but in an inner chamber, hidden there. He snapped the strings as one would snap a cord of tow "when it smells fire."

11. Bind my feet with new ropes.] In her playful dalliance, she accuses him of telling her untruths, and again urges the question as to where his strength lies, "with all the brazen effrontery characteristic of women, whose charms are great and whose hearts are bad." He still feels that he must not tell her the real secret, and so gives an evasive answer as before. These ropes were probably twisted twigs but thick and strong.

13. If thou weavest the seven locks, etc.] Braids, or plaits. He wore his hair plaited into seven tresses. In these suggestions, at each step he approaches nearer the point of divulging his secret. The bow-strings which he first mentions are further away from the mark. The new cords with which no work has ever been done were the image of his strength, and so a step nearer the truth. But now he speaks of the locks of his hair, which come dangerously near, the point of revealing his Nazarite character. "His infatuation was like that of the moth approaching gradually nearer and nearer to the flame, which at last destroys it."

14. And she fastened it with the pin.] It would appear that Delilah was a weaver, and had a loom in her apartment at which she wrought. It was an upright, after the Egyptian model, and the woof was inserted not from below upward, but from above downward. There was a web on the loom at the time, and Samson asked the woman to weave his locks into the web as woof. This she did, but as an additional security she fastened the web (with the hair woven into it) with a tent pin to the floor, or to the wall. The locks were, no doubt, strong enough to make a perfect web, and he must have laid himself down close to the loom, that the process might be properly gone through. But it was of no avail. The word "Philistines," acted as an alarm bell. He awoke in a moment, and with one wrench tore up the web, unloosed the pin, and shook his locks free of all encumbrances. Several days probably elapsed while this endeavour was being made to ensnare the too heedless victim, and it might well be asked, why one that was usually so shrewd did not discern at once that there were evil designs meditated against him. The proverb says, love is blind. That probably is the principal explanation to be given. But it is also to be noticed that Samson thought his temptress was all the while in sport, and that had to do with his allowing her to go on so long pestering him with the subject. To this it must be added that love is not only a blindness, it is also a slavery, so that when one does see a course to be wrong he still pursues it. When it reaches this length, it becomes illegitimate, for reason should never be made captive to feeling, far less should conscience. Affection for the creature should never overrule our sacred obligations of duty to our God. But this is only one aspect of the case. Samson's whole conduct in having such interviews with one that was not his wife was flagrantly wrong, and leaves a deep stain on his name.

16. His soul was vexed unto death.] Her reproaches now became sharp and incessant. The bribe of over £600, which had been floating before her eyes seemed to be vanishing out of sight; so with all the earnestness of one who was expecting to gain a fortune for life, she devoted herself to the use of every art and blandishment to gain her purpose. She was mocked, his heart was not given to her, he had not told her that which she was so desirous to know. Every day she returned to the charge, and with cutting, stinging words continued the persecuting ordeal. It was a vexation unto death. And yet he had but to break off the fellowship, and he should be free. This, however, he would not do. At last he gave up the battle. Probably, under some hypocritical promise on her part, that she would not make any improper use of the knowledge communicated, he told her all his heart—he let her into the secret. In doing this, he was tampering with that which was sacred, and he was selling away a power which God had especially given him for accomplishing, a work that was to be for the honour of His great name in the world. The only palliating feature in this act of great wickedness was, that there was much struggling of conscience before he capitulated.

19. And his strength went from him.] The traitress, with true Philistine nature, now cast every promise she may have made to the winds, and, without scruple, at once proceeded to the execution of her diabolical purpose. She calls to the princes to come, for at last she had entrapped the bird in her snare; and, when they made their appearance with the money in their hands, she gets him to sleep on her knees, and calls for a man to shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then, we are told, *she began to afflict him.* His strength began to fail as he began to lose his locks. His real strength indeed did not lie in his hair, but his hair was the sign of his consecration to God, so that when it was gone, it was a proof that God no longer was with him to acknowledge him as His servant.

20. He wist not that the Lord was departed from him. He had said (v. 17) if my hair is taken, my *strength* is taken; but now that his hair is cut off, it is said, *the Lord* had departed from him. The fact that Jehovah was specially with him constituted his great strength, and that depended on his keeping the sign sacred, namely, his hair. That gone, his vow as a Nazarite was broken.

He wist not] perceived not, or was not conscious of it. The whole of these days of sin, for such we believe is the fair intepretation of the record, were to him as a troubled dream (Isa. xxix. 8). It was as if he were under the influence of an intoxicating draught. His sense of the evil of sin was like that of a man who was looking through a mist. "The god of this world blinds the minds" of his dupes, that he may the more easily make them his prey. But the future shows that Samson was only for a time suffered to be his prey.

21. Took him] in a savage manner—as when Job said "mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me." He was made prisoner, and then "began the tempest" of his miseries. "Sin when it is finished (full grown—has gone its natural length) bringeth forth death." He found he could no longer defend himself, and so he was laid hold of.

Put out his eyes.] The most cowardly and the most cruel of ancient customs, and sorry we are to add, the most common. There are not many instances in scripture history (2 Kings xxv. 7; Num. xvi. 14), but it was very common in Eastern countries, especially when an enemy or rival was to be deprived of all power to do harm. Herodotus says, the Scythians put out the eyes of all their slaves. In many countries rivals to the throne had their eyes put out. In Persia, it is not uncommon for the king to punish a rebellious district by exacting so many pounds of eyes, and the executioners go and scoop out the eyes of those they met till they have the weight required. Sometimes the eyes were pulled or cut out; sometimes a red-hot iron was drawn before them. At other times the pupils were pierced, or destroyed, or they were taken out whole with the point of a dagger, and carried to the king in a basin. In some cases, when unskilful hands are employed, the mutilation is so great that the victim dies [*Burden*]. Here, the phrase *put out* means *bored out*.

The word *nechushtaim* (Heb.) here used implies *double brass* because both hands and feet were fettered. In ordinary cases leather was used.

He did grind in the prison house] *i.e.* grind corn with mill-stones worked by the hands—the employment of menials at which slaves were usually set to work. Women were also so employed (Luke xvii. 35), but it implied the lowest state of degradation (Isa. xlvii. 2). It was fatiguing as well as servile toil.

22. Began to grow again, etc.] This is important, as it implied that God had not finally left him. There was still hope. The hair was more important to a Nazarite than thews and sinews. He repented and his hair grew.

23. The lords gathered together to offer sacrifice unto Dagon.] The Philistines regarded the fish-shaped god-Dagon, as the god of the cities on the sea-coast, while the God of Israel was the god that had won the mainland. They regarded this decisive victory over Israel as the action of their deity, and therefore they wished to do sacrifice to Dagon, and to offer thanks. At Ashdod, and at Gaza, were great temples built to Dagon, Ekron and another sort of god (2 Kings i. 2, 16), and at Ashkelon was the far-famed temple of Ashtaroth, the Syrian Venus. The word *Dagon*, according to some means the Fish-god, as the symbol of water, an all pervading element in nature; while others make it mean *growth*, as if the idol represented the fertility and productiveness of nature.

24. Our god hath delivered, etc.] "All the contest is now 'twixt God and Dagon—He, be sure, will not connive or linger, thus provoked, but will arise and His great name assert."

25. Call for Samson that he may make us sport.] He is brought in like a chained bear to be made the object of ridicule, and to be baited by the populace, to be reviled, buffeted and jeered at, as well as to dance to the sound of music (1 Sam. xviii. 7; 1 Chron. xiii. 8; xv. 29.) The Numidian warrior, Jugurtha, was dragged in Rome in the triumph of Marius, and became insane under his inhuman treatment. Bajazet, the Turkish Sultan, being enclosed by Tamerlane like a wild beast in an iron cage, dashed out his brains against the sides of the cage. But the blind lion of Israel walks calmly on, in the consciousness that his sins are forgiven, and that his God is still with him after all that has happened.

And they set him between the pillars.] Without the slightest thought that he could do any harm there, or indeed anywhere, wherever they might place him. The pillars referred to were those "on which the house rests," so that when they were removed, the whole structure must necessarily come down. If, for example, we suppose that the two pillars were placed in the centre (for it is likely Sampson would be put in the centre, so as to be visible to all) of the building, that from these pillars beams went out like the spokes of a wheel on to the sides of the building all round resting on smaller pillars there, and that on these beams all round the sides the galleries were placed, it is manifest that the removal of these two pillars in the centre would mean that all the beams would lose their support at the one end and fall to the ground, and involve the fall also of the galleries all round. The beams might be strong without being thick, so that the view would be little obscured. But however constructed, the fact is stated that the "house rested on the two pillars." Samson came to know this.

28. Samson called unto the Lord.] The prayer would extend over more than a single sentence as spoken by him, but in the scripture record everything is extremely abbreviated, so that all we have here is the substance of what he prayed put into a single sentence; and it contains much. It implies—

(1) *He has faith in the God of Israel to the last.* Though Dagon seems to triumph, though the many thousands around him are, to a man, worshippers of Dagon, and he alone is left the solitary worshipper of Jehovah, and though Jehovah seems to have left him uncared for, the sport of cruel enemies—still his faith is unshaken in the God of Israel.

(2.) *He lays claim to God as his own God.* He says, "O *my* Lord God." As if neither had he on his side given up Israel's God, nor had he been ceased to be acknowledged by Him. It is like Jonah ch. ii. 3, 4. It was really a "fight" to own God as his God in such circumstances. Yet he acknowledges Him by his three names—Adonai, Jehovah, and Elohim. This last has the article—*the* true God.

(3.) *He still has hope in God's mercy.* He does not give way to despair. Though he has sinned and grievously sinned he yet hopes to be remembered by his God, for His mercies are great. That mercy is his trust in the dark hour. If it but act, it will set Divine power in action. It is like the prayer of the penitent thief (Luke xxiii. 42).

(4.) *He prays for the accomplishment of his life's object*—the destruction of God's enemies. They had deprived him of sight, and so rendered him unfit to accomplish that object. He prays to be remembered as to what he was in the past, the scourge of the oppressors of God's Israel, specially raised up for that purpose, but now made unable to fulfil his vocation. He means, let my strength return once more that I may avenge the injury done to me as thy servant.

29. Samson took hold of the middle pillars.] Though blind he had got from others a knowledge of what the consequence would be. "The very conception of his deed is extraordinary."

30. Let me die with the Philistines.] Not that he wished to commit suicide, but "since it cannot happen otherwise than with the loss of my own life, I shall yield up that, to get the great end of my mission accomplished." It is the language of a brave soldier in the thick of battle. His prayer is answered. He feels his strength return as before. He grasps the massy pillars, as when he tore up the gate of Gaza. He drags them with all his force from their position. They bend—totter—fall! The roof with its vast load of spectators comes down with a mighty crash. In a moment the whole building becomes a pile of ruins. When laughter, and shout, and drunken revel are at their highest, sudden destruction overtakes the entire mass of spectators. The sounds of revelry are exchanged for dying groans and agonizing shrieks—Samson himself falls, with traitors, tormentors, tyrants, and enemies all at his feet, or heaped up over him as his grave mound.

31. His brethren—came down.] The Philistines were too terrified to hinder them. His father was dead, for his burying place is spoken of; but the relatives of the family, and many of the men of Dan to which tribe he belonged came down, and without any opposition took up the dead body of their leader and gave it an honourable burial. God takes care of the dust of His people; for "precious in His sight is the death of His saints."

HOMILETICAL REMARKS.

Verses 1–31.

Lessons on the Guilt and Danger of Wilful Sin.

I. It is dangerous for one in God's service to take the shaping of his course into his own hand.

It is singular that in the case of a mission at once so important and dangerous as that with which Samson was entrusted, we never hear of any prayer he offered up for Divine guidance. In David's case we often hear of inquiry made for Divine direction (1 Sam. xxiii. 4, 10–12; xxx. 8; 2 Sam. i. 1; v. 23; Ps. v. 8; xxv. 4; cxix. 4, 5; cxliii. 8). Samson's case was pre-eminently one where a similar course should have been taken. He ought in all his visits to have asked counsel of God, Jer. x. 23; Acts ix. 6; Ps. xxxii. 8; Prov. iii. 6. To take the matter into one's own hand is to fail in giving to God the glory which is due. We cannot expect God's presence to

direct us, when His presence is not asked. The dangers in such a case are manifold, and we do not wonder if, when there was no prayer, there should be much turning aside into forbidden paths. When the Israelites were about to leave Egypt, God took them by the hand (Heb. viii. 9). He led them shepherd-like (Isa. lxiii. 11–13) more tenderly still, as a nurse (Hosea xi. 3, 4). He judged for them what was best (Ex. xiii. 17; Ps. cvii. 7). All God's children are led by the good Spirit (Rom. viii. 14). Not a step should be taken without asking our heavenly Father—where next? His hand in ours and ours in His—so shall we avoid the snares of the enemy.

II. Constant exposure to temptation naturally leads to sin.

(Comp. p. 167, &c.) We constantly hear of Samson as being among the Philistines, and scarcely at all of his being with the Israelites. It is most unsafe to be always breathing an atmosphere that is full of contagion. The temptation has got a friend in our own bosom. "Temptation itself is but a spark, and if the spark fall upon ice, or snow, or water, no harm is done. But if it fall on powder, there is an explosion at once." "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Sin is a contagious disease, and every man is more or less liable to catch the infection. The most difficult part of Samson's work was to avoid temptation while doing his duty. Where a man can, it is much safer to flee from temptation than to fight it. "The best way to conquer sin is by Parthian war—to run away." [*Adams*]. All exposure to sin is perilous. "More than if they had the plague or fever, avoid the company of the infected. Abjure every scene, abstain from every pleasure, abandon every pursuit which tends to sin, dulls the fine edge of conscience, unfits for religious duties, indisposes for religious enjoyments, sends you prayerless to bed, or drowsy to prayer. Give these a wide berth, and hold straight away under a press of canvas in your course to heaven." [*Guthrie*].

III. God's people are liable to fall into the greatest sins when left to themselves.

The native state of the heart of every good man in this world is to be corrupt. Even Paul made the admission, "in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." All that is good has to be imported, and whatever seeds are put in require time to grow, so that the old weeds still take away much of the strength of the soil, and do occasionally show very noxious fruit. Whatever good a man has he owes it to the grace of God, so that if that grace were but a little withdrawn, he is liable to be thrown over, as a child would be before a strong wind, when out of the grasp of his father's hand. Thus it was with Noah, Lot, Jacob, Aaron, Judah, David, Solomon, and many others. So it was with Samson, when, as too often, he was off his guard (see Notes on p. 322, etc.) The enemies of the Lord have but too often reason to blaspheme, owing to the heinous sins of God's professedly holy people.

IV. The unseen dangers which surround those who are guilty of great sins.

Here was Samson all alone in the very stronghold of his bitter enemies. A whole city was arrayed against him; he could not count on a single friend within its walls, and as one man they all compassed him in to effect his ruin. "His soul was among lions." Heavy iron gates closed him in, and every man inside the walls breathed vengeance against him. Yet all the while, the object of so much danger was guilty of gross sins, and was turning God Himself to be his enemy. Could anything be conceived more widely opposite to all true

wisdom of conduct, or a more daring provocation of the divine wrath, than for a professedly holy man to be indulging in sinful abominations at the moment when he was in the greatest peril of his life all round? If at first sight he did not know his danger, sin itself, through his conscience, might have awakened many a dark whisper of evil, and suggested that the very air all over was full of the mutterings of offended justice. The conscience of every man guilty of daring sin, is as a Urim and Thummim set in the heart, to give warning that a thousand dangers might burst on the soul at any moment.

Unseen dangers were around Lot all the time that he clung tenaciously to Sodom for the sake of gain, notwithstanding of its outrageous sins against God and man. What whispers of evil must have long been heard in the home of Ahab and Jezebel, because they banished the worship of Jehovah out of His own land, and set up a hideous system of idol-worship in its stead! A dreadful sound of present, as well as coming danger, must have ever been in the ear of the unhappy Saul, who was so often transgressing the commandment of the Lord. And thus it is with all who are guilty of known and wilful sin, where there is no penitence.

V. The error of misinterpreting God's forbearance.

Samson was not robbed of his strength through his sin, but on the contrary he was enabled to perform a feat such as even he was not supposed to be able to accomplish. But it would be fatally wrong to conclude from that, that God was indifferent to his sin. It is His manner to give time and place for repentance. Nor is it consistent with the ever calm majesty of all His movements in Nature and Providence, to rush forward the moment that any sin is committed, and execute summary vengeance. Especially is it His glory to be slow to wrath, and to make it clear, that "Fury is not in Him—that judgment is His strange act (something foreign to Him to do spontaneously, or for its own sake)—that his instinctive tendency is to show mercy." Yet being essentially holy, all sin must be accounted for under his perfect moral government; all the sins a man commits stand before him in greater or less accumulation, until the proper time comes for His dealing with them. And this sin of which Samson was now guilty, might be said to be a serious addition to the mass already existing. A few more additions, as in the case of his intercourse with Delilah, brought round the day of reckoning.

"Samson comes off from his sin with safety. He runs away lightly with a heavier weight than the gates of Azzah, the burden of an ill act. Present impunity argues not an abatement of the wickedness of his sin, or of the dislike of God. Nothing is so worthy of pity as a sinner's peace. Good is not therefore good because it prospers, but because it is commanded; evil is not evil because it is punished, but because it is forbidden." [*Hall.*]

VI. The heinous offence given by adding sin to sin.

The sin at Gaza not being repented of leads to the sin at Sorek; for sin unrepented of always leads to deeper sin. The tendency of sin is to grow, to develop itself, or wax stronger if it is not checked; and in this case there is no evidence of any check. If it is wrong to sin at all, it is more than doubly wrong to commit sin a second time. For it is not only to commit two sins in place of one, but it is to sin in the face of warning, remonstrance, and the mercy shown in forbearing with the first sin, so that the wonder of the Divine forbearance with it increases not so much in arithmetical as in geometrical progression. In the same progression does the guilt increase.

"One sin makes way for more; it keeps up the devil's interest in the soul;

it is like a nest egg left there to draw a new temptation." [*Manton*] We are "not to give place to the devil." "The little wimble once entered, we can then drive a great nail. If one thief be allowed to get into the house he will let in others. Every degree of entrance is a degree of possession." These two evils arise when sin is not checked at once by penitence. Sin itself multiplies, and its guilt increases. (See Rom. ii. 5, 6; 1 Kings xvi. 31-33? 2 Chron. xxxiii. 2-10; xxviii. 22-25). (Comp. pp. 311-317).

VII. The infatuation of sin.

By infatuation we mean, a *wilful blinding of the reason, and rushing on without thought or concern to indulge in sin.* The cause of this is a certain power of fascination in the object beloved. Was there ever more brazen effrontery shown to any man than in the question put in ver. 6? Any sane man, or one who was not spell-bound, would have resented it in a moment. To put such a question, was to tamper with his life and with the great mission he had in life. But he was enslaved. Sins of presumption waste the conscience more than any other sins. Guilt upon the conscience, like rust upon iron, both defile and consumes it. The tenderness of the conscience becomes lost, and its faculty of moral vision becomes blind. Its sensibility is destroyed, and by and bye it is "past feeling," so that "seeing, a man does not see, and hearing he does not hear—neither does his heart understand."

"Though he saw so apparent treachery, he yet wilfully betrays his life by this woman to his enemies. All sins and passions have power to infatuate a man, but lust most of all. Many a one loses his life, but this casts it away. We wonder that a man could become so sottish. Sinful pleasures, like a common Delilah lodge in our bosoms; we know they aim at nothing but the death of our souls, yet we yield to them and die. Every willing sinner is a Samson. Nothing is so gross and unreasonable to a well-disposed mind, that temptation will not represent as fit and plausible. Thrice had Samson seen the Philistines in the chamber ready to surprise him, and yet he will needs be a slave to his traitor. What man not infatuated would play thus with his own ruin. This harlot binds him, and calls in executioners to cut his throat. Where is his courage, by which he slew 1,000 of them in the field, but now suffers them to seize him in his chamber unrevenged? His hands were strong, but he is fettered with the invisible bonds of a harlot's love, and finds it more easy to yield, though it is the height of being unreasonable." [*Hall*].

VIII. The utter worthlessness of those who lead an impure life.

They are said to be abandoned—Because—

(1.) *They have abandoned all fear of God.* They live in open opposition to His holy commandments (Ex. xx. 14; Gal. v. 19, etc.; 1 Cor. vi. 9, 18; Rom. xiii. 12-14; Eph. v. 3, etc.; 1 Peter ii. 11). They care not for His authority. They make light of provoking Him to anger. They pollute the body which He at first made to be His temple. They present a spectacle of moral loathsomeness and corrupting example to all around them.

(2.) *They have abandoned all sense of shame.* Shame is vitally associated with respect for one's own character, so that to lose shame, is to trample character in the dust, and to become reckless. "She forgetteth the covenant of her God."

(3) *They have abandoned respect for human society.* They wear the brazen face, and affect the regardless attitude of those who despise the ban which society puts upon them.

(4.) *They have abandoned all regard for moral principle in the general actions of life.* Sin is steep and slippery, and they who have fallen deeply on one side of the hill, have come to the bottom on every side. The conscience is vitiated for the whole conduct. "She who lies can steal; one who is a thief can kill; a cruel man can be a traitor; a drunkard can falsify;" and an impure woman can be perfidious, as Delilah's conduct to Samson emphatically proves. That character is to be trusted in nothing that leaves out conscience in everything.

But while that class occupies so low a place in the scale, those who come next in degree are the persons of either sex, who care little, and do nothing for their reformation; who gather up their robes to free themselves from the contaminating touch; who, instead of using prayers and exertions for their recovery, are only anxious how orthodoxly they can speak of the evil of such conduct, and with what infallible certitude they can consign that portion of their fellow creatures to hopeless perdition. It is no wonder, if such persons, not satisfied with denouncing the openly vicious, should turn their attention to tale-bearing and evil-speaking, criminating those who may be purer than themselves, and imputing to them thoughts which exist only in their own imagination.

IX. Severe chastisement ever follows high-handed sin, sooner or later.

Delilah was but the instrument of Samson's punishment, just as she was the instrument that ministered to his unlawful pleasures. The unmitigated perfidy of that wicked woman, and her heartless betrayal of a confiding nature into the hands of relentless enemies for the purpose of torture and death, will cover her name with execration to all future ages.

But looking at God's dealings with Samson's sin, we see Him fulfilling His own threatening, or rather His promise, for His threatenings are in some sense promises to His own people, being always intended to have a merciful issue (Ps. lxxxix. 30-32). For his sin, the hero who had never lost a battle for 20 years, though his single arm was pitted against a whole nation, was at last delivered up into the hands of his enemies, just "as a wounded lion succumbs to a pack of yelping hounds." "Not only is he fettered heavily, but as the most cruel thing which the body can suffer, his eyes were gouged out, and he was made hopelessly blind." Yet now when he had lost his eyesight he saw more clearly than ever these things: (1.) *The greatness of his folly*; in having broken his Nazarite vow of consecration to the Lord; in having fraternised with the people whom he was sent to destroy; and in having repeatedly been guilty of flagrant sin like the heathen, notwithstanding his sacred position as the appointed saviour of Israel. (2.) *The depth of his fall.* Great Samson fell! O what a fall was there! From what strength to what weakness! From the hill-top to the deepest valley! From freedom to slavery! From glory to humiliation! From the brightest prospects to the darkest gloom! "Tell it not in Gath, etc." The man who gave liberty to Israel now himself grinds at the mill. As he passes along the street every boy can throw stones at him, every woman can laugh and shout, and anyone of either sex can lash him at pleasure. (3). He saw also *the abiding mercy of his God.* Quickly He made the hair of his head begin to grow again, which was the first streak of dawn appearing after a dark and tempestuous night. God was not like the men of

Israel. He did not forsake His erring servant; He did not allow the waters to overflow, nor were the flames permitted to kindle on his person. Never is the correcting discipline permitted to destroy.

X. There is a point in the sinner's course when the Lord departs from him.

(Chap xvi. 20; 1 Sam. xvi. 14; Ezek. x. 18; xi. 23.)

XI. God's departure from a man is the signal for his ruin.

(Verses 21–22.)

What a difference that departure makes! He might in some respects say with the poet—

"My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers, the fruits of love are gone,
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone."

It was a most touching sight to see him saying, "I will go out as at other times, and shake myself," and then to hear it added, "he wist not that the Lord was departed from him." He now found that Prov. xxix. 1 was but too true. "He had ruined himself beyond repair for this life; he could never be the man he was; in that dark prison his remorseful thoughts were his companions, his own past life his only view. He saw his ruinous folly, his betrayal of the trust his God had reposed in him, how out of the best material for a life of glory he had wrought for himself a life of shame and a degrading end. The strong man was crushed, and like the weakest sinner he cried to God for the light and joy of His own presence, and to be remembered with the old love. And he prayed not in vain."

XII. None of God's people are ever lost.

(John x. 28, 29; vi. 39; Isa. liv. 8-10; Ps. xxxiv. 19, 20; lxvi. 12; 2 Tim. iv. 18.)

XIII. Men's sins are seen in their punishment.

His eyes were the first offenders in Samson's case, and there especially he suffers. Thus it was with Adonibezek (Jud. i. 7). Lot's sin was worldly mindedness, and he lost all in the end. Eve listened to the serpent, and her lot was that there should be perpetual war between the serpent's seed, and her seed. Jacob deceived Esau, and was deceived in turn by Laban. There was polygamy in the households even of the good in early times, and the chastising rod was seen in the strifes that were ever breaking out in their family circles.

XIV. The mischievous effects of the sins of God's people.

The world judges of the character of Christ's religion, not as he explains it, but as Christ's people show it in their lives. They are the world's Bible; so that their inconsistencies are as so many blots in that Bible. Pre-eminently is this the case with a man high in place as Samson was, so that his fall gave large occasion to the enemies, both to think evil, and to speak evil of God's cause. Thus with David, the Lord's anointed, as in 2 Sam. xi. and xii. Thus with Moses in Numbers xx. 12, and Deut. iii. 26. And the evil done in Samson's case, as given in verses 23, 24, was to show to both Philistines and Israelites that God's servant was not protected by Him who sent him, and as the result the enemy triumphed over the God of Israel.

XV. Genuine repentance and believing prayer may restore the greatest sinner.

XV. Death brings out a man's real character.

XVII. The man who prays is stronger than those who scoff.

The prayers of Samson had a far greater effect on his enemies, than all the power which they wielded had against him.

XVIII. The wicked are sometimes signally defeated in the moment of their supposed triumph.

Col. ii. 15; Acts xii. 18, 19; Dan. vi. 22–24; 1 Sam. xvii. 49; Esther vii. The Philistines regarded Samson as now hopelessly disabled from doing them any harm. Yet he, at that moment, was taking steps to secure a greater destruction among them than ever before.

N.B.—Was Samson a type of Christ?

We believe that to some extent all the judges were types of Christ, generally for the reason, that the whole history of Israel was in a proper sense symbolical. The people were brought into existence in a special manner, to serve the purpose of prefiguring Christ in many ways. There can be no doubt at all from the testimony of the New Testament, that the spirit of the Old Testament was a foreshadowing of Christ (John v. 39, 46; Luke xxiv. 27). The smitten Rock is expressly said to mean Christ (1 Cor. x. 4). The lifting up of the serpent on the pole, is also expressly mentioned as an emblem of Christ being lifted up on the cross (John iii. 14, 15). Christ also intimates that He is the true bread which came down from heaven, of which the manna of old was but an emblem. Much of the language which David applies to himself in the Psalms, is applied by the inspired men of the New Testament to Christ.

We hold then that the whole history is full of the shadow of Christ, as our Saviour. The very name of judge is in the original, *a saviour*. Samson is supposed to have been typical of Christ in such respects as these:

1. The *birth of both was miraculous*. Jesus was born of a virgin, Samson of a barren woman.
2. Both were specially given to act the part of *Saviours*.
3. Both were *consecrated to their work by the Divine Spirit*.
4. All their work was done *through the influence of that Spirit*
5. The great need of the age in which each appeared was *penitence*
6. Both *did their work alone*, without an army, and even without arms.
7. It was *God's gracious thought to raise up such a Deliverer* in either case.
8. Each appeared at first as *a little child*.
9. Each *in death slew more* than in their life.
10. Each had an *encounter with a lion*, at the beginning of their course.
11. Each was *received with indifference* by his own people.
12. Each was *betrayed by his own people* into the hands of enemies.
13. Each was *faithful to the interests* of his own people.

14. Each submitted to be bound without a murmur.

15. Each came a *Light into the world*, to reveal character.

16. The men of Judah preferred to *continue under the Philistine yoke*, rather than follow Samson to liberty. So the Jews cried aloud, We have no king but Cæsar.

17. Both were uniformly successful *in every combat they had with* their enemies, though they fought all alone.

18. Both endured *much mockery from the world*, while fulfilling their commission received from heaven.

19. Each *proved himself able to destroy the gates* of the enemy.

20. From first to last each stood *faithful to his God* amid surrounding treason.

EXPLANATION.

With the death of Samson, the Book of Judges proper terminates. Eli and Samuel did both, indeed, act as judges, but the proper position of the former was to be the high priest, and that of the latter to be a prophet and a priest. Their public service was a sort of interregnum, between the period of the judges and that of the kings. What follows now is not a continuation of the history, but consists rather of two appendices, the first in ch. xvii. and xviii., and the second in ch. xix.-xxi. These are not composed of general materials loosely attached to the book, but form part of its organic structure, and are needed to illustrate the private life of Israel in a degenerate age.

They point out the true cause of the declensions of Israel, referred to in the history throughout, in *the strong tendency of the human heart to go away from its God*. This underlies the whole course of the history, and is set forth in these remaining chapters in two dark pictures. We see:—

I. The lapse into error of belief and worship.

We see in the case of Micah, how quickly and easily a family, and in the case of Dan, a tribe, may fall into the practice of image-worship. The *time* must have been shortly after Joshua's days, for Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, was still alive (ch. xx. 28), the tribe of Dan had not yet got its full inheritance mapped out, and it was only idolatry in its incipient form that Micah dared to indulge. Yet modified as this false worship was, that Micah should dare in his professed worship of Jehovah to make use of *images*, notwithstanding that the stern voice of Joshua still rung in his ears, as it must have done in the ears of many generations to come; notwithstanding, too, the solemn appeals of Moses, the express messenger of Jehovah, in revealing His character and will, and especially, notwithstanding the great voice that issued from amidst the thunders of Sinai, saying, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image"—shows the strong bent of the human heart to get away from the idea of a spiritual God, and to think of Him under some form of sense. A graven image implied the germ of idolatry, and was therefore not to be tolerated. Though it might begin, as in Micah's case, merely as a form of worshipping the true God, it always ended in the worship of the image itself, under the name of some false god. Even while the true God was professedly worshipped, to conceive of Him as set forth by an image of any kind was infinitely degrading to His character, and already implied a great descent in the mind of the worshipper (Rom. i. 21–23).

Thus, the case of Micah illustrates how easily and naturally, a man, whose heart was not right with God, might slide down into idolatry, deluded with the thought that He was worshipping Jehovah, and Him alone. The remembrance of the mighty God of Israel was too fresh in people's mind at this time, for them to put Him aside as the One legitimate Object of Worship. Conscience, also, was too strong to allow a man peacefully to set aside all idea of religious worship whatsoever. It was therefore found to be a convenient compromise, to profess to worship the spiritual Jehovah under a material form.

The other picture brought before us is :—

II. The lapse into flagrant wickedness of conduct.

See chaps. xix.-xxi. Here we have an exhibition of the extent to which the flood of immorality overflowed some parts of the land, when all check on the outburst of evil passions was removed. The proof is made out that were all restraint taken away, and the heart left free to follow its own inclinations, in place of becoming virtuous and good, it would soon become the opposite of all that God would have it to be, and present the spectacle of falling from the greatest heights to the very lowest depths. It is most instructive too, that this picture comes in alongside of the other, as if to show, how a loose morality and loose belief go hand in hand together, and that until there be a correct conception established in men's minds of the sin-hating character of God, there cannot be any pure and high-toned excellence of conduct prevalent upon the earth. It is a conveniently-worded motto to say—

> "For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight,
> He can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

But the argument is slender as a gossamer thread. Who ever knew of a man having his life steadily in the right, while his faith was in the wrong? When put to the test, he is uniformly found wanting. The evidence here is clear that the human heart, when released from all restraint, would go by leaps and bounds into the commission of the foulest sins. The inference is, that checks of a stringent character must be applied to it meantime, until the period arrive when the only effective check can be brought forward (Heb. viii. 10).

To account for the serious errors in Divine Worship, and the enormities of sinful conduct, which characterised that age, we are repeatedly told of—

III. The great want of those times.

"In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Four times this statement is repeated, and in such a way as to lead us to believe that, if there had been such a functionary, we should not have had such melancholy accounts to read. (See ch. xvii. 6; xviii. 1; xix, 1; xxi, 25.)

There was none to take the helm. While Moses lived, there was always a finger lifted up to point out the path of duty, and a voice heard, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." While Joshua lived, the privilege was still continued, and Israel wanted not for counsel to direct, and for authority to enforce what was good and right. But now there was no longer a public guide to lead the nation on, nor any power to act as a national conscience to cause the Divine laws to be observed.

Not that there was any absence of plan in their being thus left without a head, or that there was any defect in the arrangement. Nothing was more marked than definiteness of plan, in all God's course of dealings with His

people throughout their history. But now they had come to a new stage of their history. They had had a course of instruction under Moses and Joshua, coupled with God's own direct teaching by the wonderful acts of His power and grace wrought on their behalf, that might by this time have enabled them to judge for themselves, without being taught by a leader, that it was their wisdom and their solemn obligation alike, to fear their God under all circumstances, and with all good conscience to keep His commandments. A pause, therefore, takes place to try them on this point, and ascertain how they would act when left to themselves; without a *King*, a *Father*, a *Guide*; or, at first, even a *Judge*, or temporary Saviour. Had they, or had they not, really profited by the enjoyment of all this Divine care-taking and wonder-working. If there had been the least disposition in their heart to obey, nothing could have been more easy and grateful than to obey. The very dimmest mental eye could see what a magnificent privilege it was, for them to be at liberty to say, that the God that had wrought all these wonders was their God. Now, therefore, was the solemn moment when the heart of Israel was called on to say—"Accept or reject Jehovah!" God waited for a reply.

That reply was not long in being given. It soon appeared that the tendency of the Israelitish heart was *to depart from the living God*, and, when left to itself, to prefer rather those substitutes for the true God, which the heathen around them set up as objects of worship. The proof was fully made out, that they were not in a fit state to be left to themselves. They had indeed a law, a most complicate and comprehensive law, adapted to all the varieties of human experience and human conduct, and this law was laid down by God himself (Gal. iii. 19). But it was one thing to know what the law required, and another thing to be disposed to keep it. Hence there required to be some authority established, by which obedience to Jehovah would be enforced. The lack of a disposition to observe the holy, just, and good laws of the Great Supreme, has been sorrowfully acknowledged in all ages. Even a heathen could say—

"I see the good, but I follow the evil."

Israel then required a king, or ruling authority, to enforce the carrying out of the laws and commandments appointed by its covenant God. There was no such ruling authority now in the land. Hence the people were fast turning to idolatry in worship, and to immorality in practice.

But the idea in this descriptive text, is not so much, that there was no supreme civil authority in Israel, or principle of law recognised, as opposed to a state of anarchy and chaos. If there had been that, some good result would have followed. For law, viewed simply as a chart defining the lines of right and wrong, is a great blessing to a community, when justly and wisely framed and impartially administered, when violence and evil passion are repressed, and when order and righteous dealing between man and man are duly upheld. Something more important, however, is meant here. The king of Israel was not an ordinary king. As king he held a sacred office. *God Himself was the real King of Israel, and every legitimate occupant of the throne was his vicegerent.* The nation itself was a "holy nation." They were a church, the only church of God on the earth, and to be a king to God's church was to hold a sacred office. Hence his duties covered the whole area of religion, and it was his special duty to see that God's existence, and God's authority were universally acknowledged, that the laws He appointed for His worship should be faithfully adhered to, and that the rules He had laid down for daily life should be reverently observed.

The ordinary office of king was confined to things civil, and he became a usurper when he intruded into the sacred ground of conscience (Matt. xxii. 21)

But the King of Israel was only about his proper work, when jealously seeing to it, that all the laws and ordinances of God were duly observed by his subjects. The whole history of the kings goes on the assumption, that the king was responsible for the Divine laws being respected by his people. Accordingly, in so far as was necessary, express instructions were given to him for the guidance of the people, and he ever acted by Divine direction. Even rules for guidance in civil and social life, which are permitted among other nations to be carried out according to the judgments of men were, in the case of the "peculiar people," all directly laid down by God himself. Hence the great significance of the statement, "there was no king," as applied to Israel.

CHAPTER XVII.

IDOLATRY IN ITS INCIPIENT STAGE—BY IMAGE-WORSHIP.

(Verses 1–13.)

HOMILETICS.

I. Idolatry begins with those who are not upright in moral conduct. Ver. 1–4.

Micah himself is first heard of as stealing a large sum of money, and his mother is first mentioned as uttering curses on the head of the offender, whoever he might be. Subsequently, when the money is given up, and the offender is discovered to be her own son, the mother entirely loses sight of the immoral character of the act, and though no sorrow is expressed by him for the evil of his conduct, she at once proceeds to pour blessings on his head, simply because the money was restored. Further, she professes to have devoted the whole of the money to the service of God's house, yet when coming to the decision as to how much shall be given for that purpose, she gives really less than one-fifth of the whole to that service. No wonder, if those, who had already made a god of their money, should hold very cheaply by the name of the true God.

II. God has established in the heart of every criminal the means of detecting his own crime. Ver. 2.

How long Micah may have kept his theft a secret is not said, but memory and conscience, as two detectives working together, made every place too hot for him, until he made a full confession (Psalm xxxii. 3, 4, 5). The work of detection was done most effectively, for no man can flee from himself, and it was done directly, without any slow process of going round about (Josh. vii. 16–21). Fears were aroused in his superstitious mind, lest a mother's curse should fall upon him, and disquieting thoughts like wandering ghosts rose up before him in his fancies by day and his dreams by night, to scare him into a full disclosure of the evil act.

III. The powerlessness of human cursing. Ver. 2.

The mother cursed the thief. Was there anything in that to rouse Micah's fears? Had he any good reason to fear that the curse would really come?

That a certain power both of blessing and cursing was vested in the father, in the patriarchal age, is undoubted (Noah, Isaac, Jacob, etc.). The father was then the priest and prophet in the family. But when he either bestowed a blessing, or pronounced a curse, it seemed always to be when he was Divinely commissioned to do so (Gen. ix. 25, 26). Isaac having blessed Jacob could not alter it, nor confer the blessing on Esau also. There were limits to the power of blessing; and so with cursing. The blessing, or the curse, would not come at the mere caprice of him who pronounced it, but only as it came from the Divine Spirit, resting on the person authorised to give it. Some of the female sex were prophetesses, but only as such could they either bless or curse (Judges v.)

IV. Conscience compels a tribute to religion, even from the avaricious heart Ver. 3.

What the leading motive may have been for erecting a sanctuary in their dwelling, we are not informed, but one thing is clear in this case, that though Micah and his mother were both avaricious, they felt that the claims of religion were strong, and must have large external respect paid to them. Where any tenderness of conscience is left, there is a secret instinctive conviction, that man must have a God, whom he is bound to serve, and to whom he owes the deepest homage. So the mother spoke at first of devoting the whole 1,100 shekels (about £140), to the purpose of establishing a system of image-worship in their household. Even the hard-fisted Laban had his gods (Gen. xxxi. 19, 30; Micah vi. 7.)

V. The deceitfulness of the heart in thinking it can bribe conscience.

So much is parted with, that the heart may keep all the rest and enjoy it in quietude. An opiate is given to conscience in the religious offerings made, to lull it asleep or to blunt its sting. Every wicked man feels that he must, at any cost, still that stern voice and buy off its threatenings. But it is vain to think of closing up the black and yawning gulf of fears, which conscious guilt opens in the soul, by casting into it silver and gold, prayers and penances, deeds of charity, and formal observances of religious worship (Micah vi. 7). Nothing can purge conscience but the blood of Christ (Heb. ix. 14).

VI. The error of departure from the rule laid down by God for His own worship.

Micah departed from this rule broadly in making a graven image, which is expressly forbidden in the most solemn language uttered on Sinai (Ex. xx. 4), and which had the first of the heavy curses pronounced upon it at Mount Ebal (Deut. xxvii. 15). He erred also in following only the thoughts of his own heart, without asking counsel at the mouth of the Lord; whereas it is the very foundation of true religion to acknowledge Him in everything, and reverently observe what He appoints. For a man to try to carve out a religion for himself, different from what God has appointed, is itself an act of irreligion. Again, he appointed first his son, and afterwards a Levite, to be his priest, whereas none but the sons of Aaron could lawfully execute the duties of that office. The place too was unlawful—his own dwelling, for all acceptable public worship was required to be carried on before the ark at Shiloh. All this was highly presumptuous and irreverent. It was for a man to tell God, that he would take the matter of His worship into his own hands, and decide for himself, *when*, *where*, and *how* he would discharge his religious obligations.

Besides all this, it was an express refusal to accept the mode of worship already appointed by God, as exhibited at Shiloh, at no great distance from where Micah lived. When God has already spoken, it is for every right-hearted worshipper to obey. To bring in another mode, or to bring in a modification of His mode, would indeed be most irreverent.

VII. It is dangerous to frame a religion merely according to one's own wishes.

This is first of all to insult the Divine Majesty, as if the creature might presume to dictate to the Creator what duties He should require it to fulfil. This of itself must be a heinous offence. It is also most distrustful, as if the Creator were not infinitely kind, wise, faithful and true, and worthy of the most absolute confidence. But it implies more; it amounts to a casting off the authority of the Creator entirely, at the moment when it professes to acknowledge Him as the Object of worship. Besides, a religion so framed will be a hideous misrepresentation of all that God is, and an exhibition of what the vile and wicked heart of man would wish him to be. This is strikingly exemplified in all the religions of the heathen world, without a single exception.

VIII. Those who have no religion in the heart take the more pains to show it in the externals.

This is one of the many phases of the deceitful workings of the human heart. By making a bustle about external forms and ceremonies, a man persuades himself, either that he has something of reality about him after all, or that God will, at any rate, accept the very ardour of his manner as counting for so much. But all the while the heart will not give up itself. This is specially exemplified among those who attach excessive importance to forms, ceremonies, gestures, intonations of voice, and the like; also among those who rest on the regularity of observances, the mere number of services gone through, and the amount of penance self-inflicted. Micah gave himself a great deal of trouble with the externals, but we do not find any evidence to prove that he had any real love to God, and delight in communion with Him in the heart. Pretence of religion is seen in such cases as Hosea vii. 14; Mal. iii. 14; Matt. vi. 5, 7, 16; I. Kings xviii. 26, &c. Opposite examples: Mary sitting at Jesus' feet. The beloved disciple listening with breathless attention to the gracious words that came from the Saviour's lips. The publican smiting his breast, &c. The long-afflicted invalid saying—"If I but touch Him I shall be whole." "Lord lift on me the light of Thy countenance." In these cases we see the heart at work in giving itself to God.

IX. Some people are proud of having the name of being religious. Ver 5.

Micah wished not only to be as good as his neighbours, but he wished to have a name for religion, and so he turns his dwelling into a sanctuary. "The man Micah has a house of God." This is how he was spoken of in the world. He seemed to wish to have his house full of religion. The meaning, however, is not a house with many gods in it. The word *Elohim* seems to denote God simply. But his house contained a regular establishment of the worship of God. There was the *image*, as a representation of the object of worship; the *ephod*, or sacred dress, without which no acceptable service could be done before God; the *teraphim*, to be consulted as oracles; and the *priest*, or recognised official for conducting religious services. Was not Micah a good Pharisee? Ought not his name to go out as one zealous towards God, and abounding in religious services?

Many still regard a religious name as giving respectability, and hence they do much to gain it. They also regard it as a source of influence and so covet it.

X. The great sin of using a high religious profession as a means of getting gain.

This appears to have been the chief aim of Micah in building up his idolatrous establishment. He thought to make his house a resort for religious worshippers, or a shrine where offerings would be presented, and fees would be charged for inquiry at the oracle. It is not likely, that so avaracious a man would put out so much money on the sacred materials, without expecting to receive as much again with profit superadded. And this explains the agonising wail which he raised, when his establishment was broken up by the unceremonious Danites, "Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more?" It is a fearful provocation to a holy God, when His great name and hallowed worship are prostrated to serve the ends of covetousness.

What shall we say of gifts presented at shrines, of the sale of indulgences, of the sale too of church livings, of the presenting of unholy men to church benefices, merely for the sake of a living, and such-like practices? Or what can we think of those who take the name of Christian professor, and connect themselves with a certain church in order thereby to increase their incomes, or advance their position in society, with many varieties of the same principle? It all savours much of the Micah spirit, and must end in some fit manifestation of the Divine frown.

XI. Idolatry is a most God-dishonouring sin.

(1.) It is an inconceivable *degradation* to the Divine nature, to suppose it to be represented by dumb wood, or stone, graven by art and man's device, the work of the hands of the worshippers themselves!

(2.) Though it begins with the professed intention of worshipping the true God through the image, yet the constant presence of the image in the act of worship, and its continual association with the giving of Divine honours, insensibly leads after a time to *the worship of the image itself.* Thus another object becomes honoured and not God, and the substitute is merely a piece of wood, or a stone!

(3.) The *spirituality* of the Divine nature is lost sight of.

(4.) God Himself is lost sight of, *and creations of man's wicked nature* take His place, leading to all manner of sinful deeds.

XII. The heart's power of self-deception in matters of religion.

He supposed that now God would do him good, seeing he had a Levite to be his priest. What miserable logic does an unrenewed man show, when trying to make out a favourable case for himself as regards his personal religion. He was not right even in the one point, which he thought to be so good that it would serve for all the rest. It was *not* the right thing for a Levite to discharge priestly duties. Such honour belonged to Aaron and his sons alone. And then Micah was wrong everywhere else. It was not right to have the sanctuary of God in his own private dwelling. It was not right to have an image representing God. It was not right for any one to wear the ephod except at Shiloh in association with the ark. It was not right for him to presume to carve out his religion for himself. In truth, he was wrong all over, and yet he thought he was wonderfully near the mark.

What a small vestige of evidence will suffice, for an ungodly man to think himself "almost a Christian." A short formal prayer offered up once a day; a chapter of the Book of God read once a week; one attendance at Divine Service on the Lord's Day; a small coin given for religious purposes; those, together with a fair reputation for good morality, are held to be a sufficient proof that his name ought to go on the Christian list, though all the time he is a stranger to the power of religion, and has had no experience of having had his heart warmed with the constraining influence of the love of Christ.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Image Worship expanding into tribal Idolatry.

HOMILETICS.

I. The straits to which unbelief reduces the strong. Ver. 1.

"The tribe of Dan sought them an inheritance to dwell in." Not that they had had no inheritance till now. When a distribution was made of the land by Joshua, a considerable territory was allotted to the tribe of Dan (Josh. xix. 40-47). The other tribes, having received their proportion first, a small area comparatively was left for this tribe. But Judah gave up to them several of its northern towns, such as Zorah, Eshtaol, Bethshemesh, etc. This latter town, however, was afterwards given to the Levites. Ephraim also gave to Dan some of its southern towns. Stretching from the west of Benjamin on to the Mediterranean, the territory included first the hill country, and then all the lowlands, or the *shephelah*, being a large part of the extremely fertile plain of Sharon, having in it such towns as Jehud, Bene-barak, and others, all the way to Joppa.

But a large part of this terrestrial paradise was, at the time of the appointment, occupied by the Philistines, or Amorites, and these had to be subdued ere the Danites could enter on possession. This was no easy matter, for these enemies had iron chariots. The all-conquering faith, through which the Israelites gained all their victories, was awanting in this tribe, so that they did not succeed in driving out these doomed inhabitants. On the contrary, the Amorites forced Dan up into the mountains, and would not let them come down into the plain (Jud. i. 34,35). As the plain, or valley, was much the larger part of their inheritance, this confined the Danites within very narrow limits indeed, and hence the great straits to which they were reduced. Yet that tribe was strong in numbers, and not deficient in courage. At the latest enumeration, previous to this date, they had upwards of 64,000 men able to go forth to war. Their weak point was their unbelief. They could do nothing without their God, and He would do nothing for them, unless in so far as they trusted Him. If they had had but a strong faith, not an Amorite would have been left in all the plain, and the whole expanse of Sharon would have been theirs.

In the Christian life, from how many causes of trouble and disquiet on every side would the Saviour's friends be set free, were their trust in "the Angel that redeems from all evil," only more complete! Over how many green pastures

would they roam, and beside how many still waters would they sit down, telling to all around that one day spent in the presence of the Rose of Sharon was worth a thousand of the best days the world could give!

II. Discontent with a Divinely marked lot leads to evil. Ver. 2.

The Danites would have been pleased with the *shephelah*, or rich plains between the hill country and the sea. But with the conditions attached, that they must drive out the Amorites, they were greatly offended. It was not impossible to comply with that condition. The fathers of that generation had conquered the larger part of the land through that faith, and in the same manner, they might have finished the conquest through faith. But it was irksome, and they wanted the faith; so that they refused to take their inheritance in God's appointed way, and sought another way of their own. It is always dangerous to reject the lot which God has appointed for us, and instead, to take the ordering of our lot into our own hand. The consequence in this case was, that God left them to fall into idolatry. For if they had remained on their own proper soil, they would not have entered into the house of Micah, nor have been tainted with his forbidden image-worship (Ps. cxxv. 5; II. Chron. xv. 2). We cannot walk long in ways of our own devising, without meeting with checks to show that we are wrong.

III. Trifling circumstances often lead to the discovery of sinful schemes. Ver. 3.

"They knew the voice of the young man." Some say, it should be "the sound of"—not his *voice*, but of the *bells* that were attached to the priest's dress, and which the Levite was wearing (ch. xvii. 10). The reference here is to the passage in Ex. xxviii. 35—an explanation more ingenious than accurate, for it was not at all likely, that there was a supposed need for bells in Micah's house. Either these spies had known the Levite before, and now recognised the voice of their old friend, or they noticed at once from his speech, that he wanted the peculiar accent of the Ephraimites. This led to their questions, and those again revealed the whole truth of Micah's evil arrangement. How simply it is done! and yet how complete is the revelation! What an illustration of the solemn assurance, "Be sure your sin will find you out." This story must soon have come to be known all over Israel. Very numerous are the instances where dark plots against the ways of righteousness and truth are unexpectedly brought to light, and men are made to know that there is a God that judgeth in the earth.

IV. Silent neglect at first, leads afterwards to open rejection of God's ordinances. Ver. 5.

These Danites seem never to have given one thought to God's appointed way of worship at Shiloh, and they must have gone near to it in passing through Mount Ephraim. They simply entirely neglected the worship which God had instituted in connection with His people, through the Ark of the Covenant, but the moment they hear of an illegitimate method of worship of Micah's invention, they turn aside and ask counsel at this new shrine. They practically renounce Shiloh, and place their confidence in Micah's priest, and Teraphim. This was an advanced step in the downhill road, and ere long they ceased to acknowledge Shiloh at all, and set up a system of idol-worship systematically, when they reached their new settlement in the north (vers. 30, 31). Sin grows.

V. The most inoffensive people are not safe from the attacks of evil men. v. 7, 9, 10.

When God's claims are put aside, the rights of fellowmen are but lightly regarded. The fear of God is the true restraint on man's lawless passions everywhere, and in every form. What a relief to Joseph's brethren, when in the hands of those who seemed to be rough men they heard the ruler say, "I fear God!" (Gen. xlii. 18). How uncomfortable did Abraham feel when residing for a little time in Gerar, he was constrained to say to himself, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place!" In the antediluvian age, "the earth was filled with violence," because all fear of God was gone. Lot had a very troubled life in Sodom for the same reason. No chain is so binding, no clasp is so secure on its victim, as the fear of God on the conscience of man. Among the Danites, the knowledge of the God of Israel had already become very faint in their minds, and placed little or no restraint on their evil desires. On how many sides is the wisdom of true religion as a benefit to man vindicated.

VI. Religion is sometimes invoked to aid the plots of the ungodly. Ver. 5.

Though there is no real reverence for God's name and character with this class, there is yet a secret conviction that it would be safe to have Him on their side. However intense the wish of the heart to get away from the thought of God, that is not able to smother the conviction of the understanding, that there is a God, and that our lot and life are really in His hands. So strong is this conviction, that even when the knowledge of the true God is lost, false gods start up in the mind in His stead (ii. Kings i. 1–16).

VII. Indirectness is a character of the world's counsel. Ver. 6.

How vague the reply of the Levite priest. It simply said nothing. To the ear it had the sound of success, but to a calm analysis it might be construed into either success or failure. But this is a feature of the world's speech on religious subjects. It seems to sound well, yet it wants the true ring. A haze hangs over their language, and there is no direct coming to the point. Instead of plain, straightforward statement, there is a certain indefiniteness in the expressions employed; you see the crook of "the old serpent," and the meaning is left in doubt and uncertainty. On the contrary, when the heart is right with itself, and with its God, everything is distinct, direct, and unhesitating. These are the characters impressed on truth.

VIII. False worshippers take refuge in imitating the appearances of the true. Ver. 14, 17, etc.

The symbols of worship which Micah adopted were a copy of those made use of at Shiloh. The ephod was the most important part of the priest's vestments, the graven image and molten image corresponded probably with the Shekinah and the ark, the teraphim answered to the Urim and Thummim, and the Levite belonged to the sacred tribe. Now he felt sure of the Divine blessing, though everything was but a caricature of the true. Thus multitudes believe that if they but wear the semblance of religion, keep up an external form of respect for its requirements, show reform of manners, and go through certain observances, all will be well with them, though there is no real giving of the heart to the Lord. They retain their idols, and so many of their evil ways, but because they proudly "do many things, and hear the gospel gladly," they think themselves in a good way for the Divine blessing here, and for heaven itself

hereafter. The Jews also thought that because they had Abraham as their father, because they had the temple of God among them, and had the name of being God's people, therefore it was, and must be, well with them, though they lived wicked lives, and refused to walk in the way of God's commandments. Many still build similar hopes on their having pious parents, being enrolled as members of a Christian church, and enjoying the privileges of Christian society, though they have nothing of the spiritual life in their hearts.

IX. Divine Providence often offers no interruption to the execution of the designs of the wicked.

We assume that the designs of the Danites were wicked, because, first—the district of Leshem appears to have been beyond the doomed territory of the Canaanites that was marked out for destruction; and second—because the motives by which they were actuated were simply lust of territory, without regard to any question of title or right. And besides Leshem was not any portion of the land given to them. They were therefore guilty of robbery on the one hand, and of wholesale murder on the other. Yet no thunders roll, and no lightnings flash, to show the anger of righteous heaven against such conduct. Thus it often is in daily life. Men are allowed to go on in their wickedness meantime, and even atrocious deeds are done while God keeps silence. Yet for all these things God will bring them one day to judgment (2 Pet. ii. 3; Rom. ii. 4–9; Eccl. xii. 14).

X. The sudden destruction of the man-made religion. Vers. 15-20.

Micah's religion was, like that of many others, only an appearance, not a reality. It had no foundation of principle to stand on. It was a case of building on the sand. Job. viii. 11–16.

XI. Prayer will not secure the Divine blessing on a wrong action. Vers. 5, 6, also vers. 18, 19.

The Danites wished prayer to be offered for them by the priest, that God might prosper their journey. Yet that journey meant high-handed robbery and murder. How could they presume to expect that God would prosper such villany? How could they dare to ask God's countenance in sin?

XII. Worldly minds care little for accuracy in spiritual things. Ver. 17-19.

They would stand out for rigid accuracy as to the measure of land allotted to them. And in any mercantile transaction, they would see to it with the keenest particularity that the exact thing stipulated for was given. But when it is a matter of paying to God the reverence which is due, they make small inquiry whether they do it in the appointed manner or not. "Those that are curious in their diet, in their purchases, in their attire, in their contracts, are yet in God's business very indifferent."

XIII. Neither moral principle nor sound reason can be expected of those who deny to God His natural rights.

It was base in the extreme for those very men whom Micah had so hospitably entertained to turn upon him and callously rob him of all that he counted most sacred in his dwelling. To take away forcibly his graven and molten images, his ephod, and his teraphim, along with the priest himself, was a rough

act of brigandage at the very least, if it should not rather be called sacrilege. True it was a righteous judgment from God on the transgression of Micah, but the Danites did not mean it so, neither in their hearts did they know it to be so.

And what a miserable mockery of reason was it, for the lawless men to set up as gods, objects that could not save themselves from being stolen! How could they expect the gods, to bless the men that stole them—men who had virtually been guilty of sacrilege! Why make so much of objects that are graven by art, or man's device? Why should rational creatures worship the work of their own hand?

XIV. Success in evil is no proof of the Divine approval.

God gives temporal gifts (not blessings) or successes to the wicked—spiritual good things only to His own children.

XV. True service is not to be expected from a false priest. Ver. 20.

The Levite priest was a mere mercenary. Good wages were all that he cared about; and having no religion he had no morality. What a miserable caricature of a priest!

XVI. The excessive importance which an idolater attaches to his gods. Ver. 24.

The exclamation, "Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more?" was the truest thing to which Micah gave utterance in this short but sad history. It may have arisen from two causes. (1.) *The apparatus of images, ephod, teraphim, and priest, was really all the religion he had.* In his heart of hearts he had none. When the externals were taken away he was left absolutely bare. He had the delusion, that he was a religious man, and he could not afford to want the delusion. Alas! how many are in the same predicament. It is a fancy, not a power. It is all paper money with no gold in exchange; or rather when the cheque is presented, the reply is, "No effects." But the mere name of having something, such persons cannot want. When the consciousness breaks in on the soul that it is utterly religionless, in a moment the inward monitor is aroused, and the very thunder in the heavens is too feeble, to echo the voice that rolls through the soul of the poor spiritual bankrupt! Also,

(2.) *His worldly estate was invested in his gods.* True, only 200 shekels were given to the founder for making the images, but the remaining 900, spoken of may have been expended on the ephod, the teraphim, the fitting up of the house as a temple, the support of the priest, and other matters not mentioned. But the main idea is, that for the future. he looked to the proceeds that might be derived from consulting his oracle as his real income. He meant in fact to trade on the superstitious fears of the community all around him. His "house of gods" was his mint. He coined money thereby. How easily is the formalist deprived of his religion! It is not shut up in the iron safe, and doubly, trebly locked, but is left outside the dwelling, exposed to the fierce winds, and a prey to the passer by. Only that religion we can keep safely in all circumstances, which is laid up in our heart of hearts, and which gives colour, variety and force to all the outgoings of the life.

How different from Micah's complaint is that of the truly pious man! The light of God's countenance is his riches, and his language is, "O that I knew where I might find Him!" "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory!" "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me; restore to me the joy of Thy salvation," &c.

XVII. The extraordinary development of an evil seed. Vers. 30, 31.

Little did the mother and son think that day, when the one told the other, that the supposed lost money was after all safely treasured up, and when the proposal was made to carve a graven image with it, that the little seedling would in a few months' time wax into a wide-spreading tree, covering hundreds of homes in Israel with a deadly night-shade. It was the opening of a little poisonous spring which soon acquired the breadth and force of a river, and for many years proved a curse to a large section of a tribe among the people of God.

CHAPTER XIX.

A Tragic Chapter in Israel's History.

(Vers. 1–30.)

HOMILETICS.

This chapter contains the history of an unmitigated abomination. Perhaps the best comment upon it is to pass it by. But nothing in human life does God pass by. It seems to be needed, that there should be a few specimens recorded of the darkest phases of human depravity, if for no other reason, than to show to what depths in the mire of sin even professed worshippers of the true God may sink, when given up to the lusts of their own hearts. It shows also how far the hand of redeeming grace has to stretch, ere great sinners can be received back into the Divine favour. It is not necessary to do more here, than to take a glance down the page.

What we have got here is a specimen of the low morality, which existed in the only church of God on earth in that age. Not that every place was so bad as Gibeah, but that such a scandal was possible in even one place, so soon after the days of Joshua, for Phinehas, who was for some time contemporary with Joshua, was still acting as priest before the ark (ch. xx. 28). The case of a Levite is selected, one of the sacred tribe, and therefore presumed to be an exemplary keeper of the law. We hear first of—

1. *His unlawful wedlock.* "He took to him a concubine." This tie, whatever it was, still permitted of her partner being called her "husband" (ver. 3). But it was essentially a doubtful morality, of the kind described in Matt. xix. 8. Such a connection was no longer tolerated, when the Saviour appeared and brought out the spirit of the law (Matt. xix. 4-6).

2. *The unfaithful conduct of the woman.* Ver. 2. A heinous sin against God, and against her husband.

3. *Little is made of so great a crime.* Ver. 3. The husband, though a Levite, appears to have said nothing by way of condemning such conduct. Had the sin been fully and faithfully dealt with, and suitable penitence been exercised, there might then have been reconciliation with God through the blood of atonement. Till that was done, the way was not clear for a proper arrangement between husband and wife.

4. *To cover up sin will not bring prosperity* (vers. 3, 4). "So they wrap it up" (Prov. xxviii. 13). The God with whom we have to deal is a holy God, and "evil-doers shall not stand in His sight."

5. *The greatest sinner is invited to return in any age.* However great God's abhorrence of sin, it is the uniform testimony of His word that "all manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men" on due repentance, and the exercise of trust in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour.

6. *The great harm that may arise from indolence and indecision.* Vers. 5–8. The fearful tragedy that happened might have been prevented had the parties in the case shaken off their sloth, and gone their way at an early hour. Love of ease is natural, but must be given up at the call of duty. Delays are dangerous.

7. *The people of God in this world live in the midst of enemies.* Ver. 10–13. "Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech."

8. *Human sympathy is dried up in the breasts of those who cast off God* (ver. 15).

How different the case of Job (ch. xxxi. 32). But where God is cast out, there is no room for man. Where there is no fear of God, selfishness and inhumanity reign supreme.

9. *The value of one friend where all are cold* (vers. 15, 20).

Examples: The thief on the cross (Luke xxiii. 41); Onesiphorus (2 Tim. i. 15–17); Timothy (Phil. ii. 19–21); Epaphroditus (Phil. ii. 25, 27).

10. *A Canaanite vice found in an Israelitish city* (1 Cor. xv. 33, with Lev. xviii. 22–25, 27, 28). The sins of Sodom were found in Benjamin, showing how ripe they were for ruin.

11. *Radical error of religious belief is contemporaneous with grievous lapse into sin.* When the Lord of the conscience is denied, the chief restraint on the depravity of the heart is removed, and like the waters of the lake when the barriers are burst it rushes out till it finds its lowest depth.

12. *The doom of the impenitent offender* (ver. 25-27).

13. *The publication of the horrid crime* (ver. 29).

14. *The sensation of horror caused throughout Israel* (ver. 30).

CHAPTER XX.

THE CRY FOR VENGEANCE.

(Vers. 1–48.)

HOMILETICS.

1. *This cry was universal* (ver. 1).

"From Dan to Beersheba, with Gilead." There was not a dissentient voice.

2. *They were in earnest* (ver. 2). Such numbers.

3. *Their desire for accurate information* (vers. 3-7).

4. *The vengeance must be summary* (ver. 8 etc.).

5. *They were united in their purpose* (ver. 11).

6. *A whole tribe takes part with the wicked city* (vers. 13, 14).

7. *The men of zeal act in a spirit of presumption and self confidence, and are defeated* (vers. 18-25).

The first step was wrong. They took the matter into their own hands, and decided for themselves to punish Benjamin. And then having settled that, they only asked God, "Who shall go up first?" Thus to put God out of His right place, and decide for themselves without Him was a very grave error. And He is jealous of the glory which is due to His great name. Even on the second day their first step was to set the battle on array against Benjamin, and then they come, as a second step, to ask the question: "Shall we go up at all?" Which means, shall we do that which already we have decided to do? God will not be mocked, so He again left them to themselves. But on the third day they were full of penitence, humiliation, and reverence, and left themselves entirely in His hands. At once they gained their point (vers. 26–28.)

8. *The temporary success of the wicked, no proof of the Divine favour.* Ver. 34, 35.

The Benjamites being twice successful in pitched battles, thought they were to be successful all through, and that God was not frowning on their conduct. So is it with many. "These things thou hast done, and I kept silence, etc." (Eccl. viii. 11). Yet suddenly destruction cometh; "as fishes are caught in the net, or birds in the snare."

9. *When the hour of the wicked comes there is no helper.* Ver. 40-45.

Here was more than a mere chastisement. It was almost an annihilation of a tribe in Israel. It was the "day of the Lord," for men convicted of great crimes, and now their sins came into remembrance. The men of Gibeah were swept away with the besom of destruction, and all the wicked in that sinning land were "cut down as the grass, and withered as the green herbs." The sword before, the fire behind, and the hosts of 11 tribes all around them, there was no escape. All perished, except a very small remant, who took refuge in one of Nature's strong fastnesses. An awful beacon to warn generations to come!

CHAPTER XXI.

A Great Calamity prevented.

(Verses 1–25.)

HOMILETICS.

1. *Zeal is always right in denouncing sin.*

It would have showed a lamentable lack of the reverence due to the God of Israel, if such a hideous revelation of evil as that which was discovered at

Gibeah, had not met with a loud and emphatic protest on the part of His covenant people. The Church at Ephesus was commended because they "could not bear them that were evil." In the present case, tolerance to Benjamin would have been treason to Jehovah—a principle too often forgotten. Paul at Athens (Jude iii.; Num. xxv. 7, 8–11, 12). Want of zeal against sin condemned (1 Sam. iii. 13; Rev. ii. 14, 15; v. 20).

2. *The evils of rash oath-making* (ver. 1). Compare with rash vowing—*see* pp. 455, 457, 464.

In their calm moments the men of Israel found that their zeal was not according to knowledge, for they practically shut themselves up to exterminate the tribe of Benjamin. Hence a backwave of great sorrow (vers. 2, 3). "There may be over-doing in well-doing. That is not good divinity which swallows up humanity."—*Henry.*

3. *It is a promising sign when people bring their difficulties to God to have them settled* (ver. 2-3).

It was doubtless, He who suggested to them the question in v. 5, the answer to which led to a solution of the dilemma that now stood before them. The number 12 was something sacred in the estimation of an Israelite. It was mixed up with the promises of God, and with the whole history of the sacred people.

4. *Great rigour characterised the expedients of Old Testament times.* (ver. 10-12.)

There was blood-shedding in the punishment of the sins of Gibeah. Not only on one town did the sword of justice fall, but from Dan to Beersheba all the tribes of Israel were gathered in vast numbers on the field of battle. In three great battles did the blood flow till 65,000 men had fallen, and one whole tribe, the children of the youngest brother, was left in desolation before the deadly strokes of the children of the elder brothers. And now more blood must flow, because of the excess of blood which has already been shed. The men of Jabesh-Gilead must die with their wives and children, in order that the young women may be got for wives to the sons of Benjamin that are yet spared. We might almost say with Jeremiah (ch. ix. 1, 2), But why were not the virgins in Benjamin itself not spared? This whole history is a specimen of the spirit that characterised the days, when as yet the true atonement had not been made, and God had not yet become the "God of peace."

5. *The great evils which flow from men taking the vindication of God's honour into their own hands.*

The instinct of every true man of God would say—Let God Himself speak in this matter, and say what should be done. Man is not fit to judge for the great Jehovah. This was the great error of the Israelites in this tragedy. They decided first what the course should be, and then asked God to sanction it. And what a mess they did make of it! They well nigh extinguished the name of their brother Benjamin, and when they discovered that deplorable mistake, how much rough soldering work did they go through to put matters right! Of this, the manner in which they tried to find wives for the few men that were left of the desolate tribe is a melancholy illustration! There is no safety but in ever asking counsel at the mouth of the Lord. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths."

APPENDIX.

ON THE

HIGHER USE OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

It is important to inquire, *Is there any distinctive purpose served by the Book of Judges as one of the sections of the Sacred Canon?* Has it a definite aim? and if so, in what light should it be read so as to reap the full harvest of its meaning? Would the Scripture record suffer mutilation were this part of it left out?

This question is the more pertinent, that not a few writers have indicated *a disposition to underrate the value of this Book*, as if it scarcely deserved a place in the Sacred Canon at all. Its authenticity is unquestionable, yet it is described as treating of the most secular view of Israelitish history, as containing matters of inferior interest, and, in spirituality of tone, as falling below both the portions which precede, and those which follow it. Its morality and religion alike are pronounced to be of a declining, not an ascending tendency. The Divine purpose is less obvious in the succession of events, while the darker shadows of the narrative are unrelieved by devotional compositions, or doctrinal teachings, such as illuminate and elevate the writings of Moses, and the annals of the Jewish monarchy.

Indeed most commentators, if they do not speak of the Book in a positively depreciatory tone, yet fail to find any specific purpose served by it, such as no other section could supply were it removed from its place. They read it as common history, and look too exclusively at the immediate bearing of the events recorded, without reference to ulterior and more sacred ends. *Bachmann*, a writer of great critical acumen, sees in it merely a time of conflict between untamed nature and the discipline enjoined by God. *Keil* views this as a transition period, when the nation was taking root in the land, and familiarising itself with the theocratic constitution, but does not see any *nexus* joining it with the other books as parts of one scheme. But surely 400 years was too long for a transition period. *Kitto* says the people were now placed on the footing of acting for themselves under the reign of the theocracy, but that the record is simply a selection of facts from unconnected documents, which show that when the people adhered to the Lord they prospered, but when they fell away they suffered great afflictions, and again when they repented they were delivered. *Lias* regards this as a period of collapse of the theocratic policy of Israel, which was so pure and high-pitched in its tone, that a people so long down trodden had not the moral strength to bear it. *Cassel* regards this as the first period of the nation's life as a settled people. Formerly a minor, it now takes into its own hands the administration of its God-given constitution. Unlike other nations, it knows the moral grounds of what befalls it, and on obedience it knows its well-being and peace depend. This book is a text-book of the fulfilment of this arrangement. *The Speaker's Commentary* regards it as an exhibition of the moral causes which led to the fall and rising again of the chosen nation, and also as a record of the righteousness, faithfulness, and mercy of God. The preservation of Israel through this period was not an accident, but part of God's eternal plan for human salvation, and therefore the record forms an integral portion of scripture. It also teaches many lessons. *The Pulpit Commentary* describes it as a heroic age between 1500 and 1000 years B.C., the deeds recorded being parallel to the tales of mythology as given in the dim twilight of history, the object being to denounce idolatry and confirm the people in the service of Jehovah. *Jamieson* regards it as a fragmentary history, containing a collection of important facts and signal deliverances, but sees no design running through it. To give only one other name, *Bush* regards it as a filling up of the gap between Joshua and the kings, describing the disorders which naturally prevail where there is no magistracy nor settled condition of society.

All these verdicts accurately characterise the Book in certain of its aspects, yet fail to exhibit its whole matter brought up to the proper standpoint and *do not strike the vein of*

instruction which specially belongs to it in its place. There are considerations on the surface which should do more than redeem it from the charge of being more secular than sacred, and comparatively barren of the elements of spiritual profit. It is no trifling circumstance that it should be *selected to form part of the Sacred Canon*, and that its right to occupy that place should have remained unquestioned for more than 30 centuries. On the merest glance at its contents too, we find *God's hand at work, and God's voice speaking*, from first to last in the whole series of events, carrying on a course of dealing with His people. It is a history full of *displays of the Divine perfections* in defending His people from their enemies, and still more in His marvellous patience and forbearance exercised towards them under repeated and high-handed rebellions. It also contains remarkable *illustrations of faith, and true nobility of religious character* on the part of God-fearing men. Not a few of the brightest names on the roll of faith in Hebrews ch. xi. are found in the actors whose deeds are recorded here. It is to the Book of Judges that we owe a great part of the materials of the noblest prose-poem that adorns the page of Scripture. The working of the principles on which the Divine Government proceeds runs like a thread through this history, and we see in real life the practical application of those principles both for individuals and for communities.

Nor is it unimportant to add, that this the latest added section for him to the historical portion of the holy "Law of God," *had a charm for the sweet singer of Israel*, while he, in name of all the spiritually-minded of every age, sings with deep fervour, not only of the "statutes" and "judgments," and "testimonies," but also of the "mighty acts" which it recorded, as matter of exultant thanksgiving and praise. In the Psalm of psalms, the author of that beautiful ode could ill have wanted this portion of the inspired writings—an eighth part of all that he had, as illustrating by facts the principles which he enunciated in that glowing eulogy of the Law of the Lord. In apostolic narratives and epistles, we have indeed lamps of superior splendour shining on our path for guidance amid the darkness, yet we dare not refuse those lesser lights a place in the firmament any more than we should think of blotting out the stars of night, because of the greater glory of the mid-day sun.

There is, however, undoubtedly, a higher view of this portion of the sacred volume than that which is more immediate. There are considerations which impart to it a deep significance of meaning, that it could not have simply as a repository of moral teachings. Behind all these actors, and these acts, *there is a large design slowly being unfolded*, and it is in tracing that design, and having regard to its aims, that we find the principal instruction contained in this, as in every other section of the Old Testament writings. This will appear, if we reflect on the following points :—

I. This Book has a relation to the other historical Books of Old Testament Scripture as part of a great plan.

All the Books of the Old Testament hang together as links in a chain. None of them bring out their principal meaning, when isolated from the others. None of them contain merely desultory history. We have not in any of them simply an aggregate of facts, selected because of their striking character, but without regard to a line of thought and intention, running on from the beginning to the end. However disconnected at first sight the compilation may seem, the moment we scan the record closely, we find orderly disposition in all the Books, and organic connection of part with part in a symmetrical whole, in a manner similar to the regular gradation of geological strata in the crust of the earth. All the sections are pervaded by unity of design, and each in its place is needed to develop that design. From Genesis to Nehemiah, and again to Malachi, there is continuity unbroken, a gradual unfolding. All the sections are dovetailed into each other with the closest fitting—a unity like that of the human frame, which is "fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth." Those take an unwarrantable liberty with the record, who would displace its parts, under the idea that the relation in which they stand to each other is purely accidental. Much of the force and significance of the history, and especially the comprehensive bearing of the whole, lies in the light which is shed on the whole by the relative adjustment of one part with another, as well as by the progressive development of the underlying design.

In this chain the Book of Judges forms a link. Were it a-wanting a gap would be made which none of the other sections could supply. As the human body would be maimed by the loss of a finger, so would the Old Testament Revelation lose its symmetrical completeness, were this portion taken away. In every chapter there is design, and a great purpose all through. Besides the immediate, there is a higher teaching from its being part of a connected plan which is gradually being unfolded in each successive Book, and which, when completed, constitutes the Revelation made in the former times.

No formal announcement is indeed made of there being any such carefully devised and far reaching scheme in the first part of the sacred volume, nor is there any literal detail given of it on the written page. Special reasons there were for withholding the information. But such a scheme is everywhere assumed to exist; it underlies the whole series of the writings, and imparts a hallowed savour and deep significance to the whole. The scheme is *acted upon* rather than openly *announced*, and we learn of its existence from inference and meditation rather than from direct teaching. We see the shadow of a substance which has not yet appeared full on the page. Here and there significant utterances are given respecting a glory, which is to distinguish the ages to come, and bring in a golden age such as the world has not yet seen. For the time present, a course of gracious dealing is kept up, notwithstanding repeated apostacies, the grounds of which are not yet apparent, but the key to which future ages, it is predicted, will supply. And when we pass down to the dawn of these future times, constant references are made to the voices that were uttered in the past, and the prognostications that were then given of the "mystery" that is now revealed. Thus, alike from the substratum of Old Testament Scripture, and from the whole surface of the New Testament teaching, the testimony converges as to the existence of a comprehensive scheme, which the inspired writers of the former Dispensation were commissioned to make the subject of their narratives.

II. This plan is wrapped up in the History of a People.

In the Old Testament, *the history of a people is the only object which appears in the foreground.* An account of the seed of Abraham from their origin onwards, the more remarkable events that befell them, the history of unique character which they led, its lights and shadows, sins and chastisements, their wonderful emancipation from bondage and lifting up from being slaves to become princes, their remarkable wilderness journey and rest in the promised land, the many changes that chequered their history as the generations went and came, with all the bright streaks of light that poured down on them from the mountain-tops of prophecy, as they came nearer the sun-rising of the golden era of the future—all this fills up the entire foreground of the Old Testament writings. No other topics are introduced, not even the histories of any of the great empires of the remote era, however imposing in grandeur, or romantic in detail, except the few points where their history incidentally crosses that of the "peculiar people," to whom all other people are ever made second. Abstract the history of these people from the page, and you have an almost perfect blank. And when narrative gives place to prophecy, it is God's dealings with that people that form the absorbing theme of the record.

But in addition to this, they appear in the foreground *under a peculiar character.* They do not live for themselves. It is not to invest themselves with a striking aureola of glory, that such a distinguished position is assigned them. They are but the instruments of bringing glory to another. They are a public people. Their history does not belong to themselves. They are set for a "spectacle," In the expressive phrase of the prophet, they are "*men wondered at*" (Zech. iii. 8.) (מוֹפְתִים) (Joel ii. 30.) men of *signs* to others, not only *types* but men of *instruction*—a people whose vocation it is to give an instruction about God's character and ways such as is given in no ordinary way. They are to be regarded as mirrors, in which is reflected the shadow of a glory that is not yet directly visible. They serve in fact the purpose of an open Bible to the world. Jehovah Himself says of them, "This people have I formed for myself, &c." "Ye are my witnesses." When God called them to Himself, he said, "All people among whom thou art shall see the work of the Lord, for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee." (Comp. the Church of the New Dispensation i. Cor. iv. 9; Eph. iii. 10; ii. Thess. i. 10.)

Since then no other material stands on the page, we are shut up to regard this history as the revealing medium of God's character and purpose to men upon the earth. From the first rise to the latest stage of that history, the shapings of that course, the complexion of its events, the exhibitions of character made, and the vicissitudes of condition experienced, the movements of the Divine hand constantly seen, and the utterances of the Divine voice heard, the Divine treatment of the people, and their treatment of their God—in the whole panorama of life presented, we see the photograph of a heavenly design, which God chooses to make known to man through the living history of men.

It is equally clear that the scheme, which is by this history foreshadowed, is the same with that which forms the chief subject matter of the New Testament Dispensation. For if the prominent subjects of that Dispensation are not everywhere pointed to in the history of that people, they cannot be referred to in the Old Testament at all, seeing it has no other matter of which it treats; yet the Messiah Himself, and all New Testament writers, are express in their assurances that the Old Testament throughout is just a foreshadowing of what was to take place under the New, when the Messiah should come. We are therefore shut up to the conclusion that this history is in some sense full of the scheme of the Christian Redemption, unless we are to regard the whole New Testament testimony as a lie.

The special function, then, of the history of this people, was to give pre-intimation of the coming of "the Christ," and to foreshadow His great work. This they were to fulfil, not merely by formal announcements of His advent in "the fulness of time," nor by bearing oracular messages, or becoming the depositaries of Divine communications, nor by having a system of sacred laws, and Messianic institutions established among them (though all these functions they fulfilled), but their whole history as a people was to be a living prediction of that wonderful Person and His glorious work; for *they were to be in themselves living embodiments and illustrations figuratively of the great salvation-work which the Messiah was to accomplish.* Their history was to be the ground plan of what that work was to be. Their very existence was a sign and a pledge that the Messiah would come, for if there were no Messiah to come they had in that case no mission to serve. The very fact that there was such a people, and that they had such a history, was virtually His casting His shadow before Him in token that He was on His way.

III. The history of this people takes its rise in a Messianic germ.

The bud of the Messianic scheme we find in the few pregnant statements which God made to their father Abraham when choosing him out from the rest of the world. It was not yet time to do more than show the scheme in embryo, so that we are to make the most of the slightest indications in the passages referred to (Gen. xii. 1-3; xiii. 14-17; xv. 5-7, 18-21; xvii. 1-3, 16, 19, 21; xxii. 1-18). From a somewhat close examination of these passages the following points are made out:—

(1.) *This people (Abraham's seed) owe their very existence to a Messianic purpose.* When first spoken of they had as yet no existence; they were only a seed promised. For Abraham was childless, and he was now past age for becoming a father in the natural course of things. Therefore a seed, if given him at all, must be a special gift—a seed that would not have come into existence at all but that a great Messianic purpose was to be served. It was wholly an act of grace. "The Lord had need of them" to usher in a scheme of grace, that it might have its accomplishment. Their object in existence was not to serve the common ends of human life, but to be the medium of conveying Messianic blessings to a perishing world.

That this intimation really refers to the Messiah is distinctly affirmed by the inspired writer in Gal. iii. 16, where notice is taken that the word "seed" (זֶרַע) is in the singular number, meaning *one* person, not the whole people. It is as if he had said, "in the seed of thy seed," *i.e.*, in one illustrious Person of thy posterity, who shall one day appear, shall the blessings of salvation be bestowed on all the nations of the earth.

(2.) *They furnish the line of the Messiah's ancestry.* This salvation-bringing seed was not to appear for a considerable time. It was not fit that so great a coming should take place abruptly, or without much heralding. A very elaborate system of preliminaries must be gone through, in order to usher in suitably an event so glorious, and so mighty in its effects on the history of mankind. Large time must be allowed for preparation. A wide gap of history must be filled up with much foretelling of the great future. The history of Abraham's natural posterity fills up the gap and furnishes a line of ancestry from whom the Messiah should come. Had this people altogether ceased to exist, as on several occasions they were on the point of doing, the Messiah could not have come as Abraham's seed, for in that case the line from Abraham would have been broken.

This fact alone imparts a sacred character to the history of the nation, leading them to be separated from the rest of the world, and marked out as a people holy unto the Lord. It was an honour incomparably higher than any nation ever enjoyed, and raised them from the lowest level to the height of becoming a "peculiar people" and a "holy nation." Hence the greatest care is taken of the line of their descent. It was in Isaac, not in Ishmael; in Jacob, not in Esau, that Abraham's promised seed was called. The whole people are reckoned to be a "holy seed," a church of the living God, and the strictest charge is given against their intermarrying with any of the heathen nations. Hence they were specially protected as a people, amid all the desolations that swept over their distracted land.

(3.) A yet more sacred and instructive fact in their history was *their intimate union with the Messiah.* They were his brethren!—children together of one father, members of the same family circle! Descended of the same stock, they were of one blood with Him. He was bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh! He was one of themselves, had a common lot with them, a common history, and common prospects. *What was theirs was His, and what was His was theirs!* It was not merely a union after the flesh. In all cases where there was faith, the covenant was ratified, and union after the spirit was enjoyed. Where there was no faith, the privileges of the union after the flesh were forfeited. But all who truly believed were, in an important sense, counted as the seed, and reckoned one with the Messiah, as the head is with the members, the husband with the wife, and the tree with the branches.

There is entire community of interest. And they have a common property in each other. He belongs to them, and they belong to Him. "They are all of one" (Heb. ii. 11). Hence He often calls them, "my people," "my chosen," "a peculiar treasure unto me," "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." Most wonderful language, as showing the vast stretch and inexpressible tenderness of the Divine love! One might pause for hours in contemplating such a spectacle of loving-kindness as this. O, the depth!

There is not only *intimacy*, but *identification*. As in the New Testament, those who believe are said to be "in Christ," so here, the word "seed" is not loosely, but advisedly, put in the singular number, as if to denote alternatively, either the *one* Christ, or the *one* people of Israel (comp. Acts ix. 4, 5; Eph. v. 30). This oneness between the Messiah and His people lays a foundation broad and deep for all the wonderful outgoings of the Divine love towards them; also for putting so high a price on them as compared with others, for the extraordinary tenderness of the Divine treatment given them, and for the watchful care taken of them through all the lights and shadows of their marvellous history.

(4.) *This people in their history are a grand illustration of the blessings the Messiah was to bring to men.* They present the picture of a people already brought nigh unto God. Instead of a formal announcement that the Messiah was to bless men by "bringing them to God," to pardon, reconciliation, and access to the free and full enjoyment of God's favour and friendship, the thing is set forth as already done in the experience of this people. They are seen actually taken into covenant relationship with Him. With amazing condescension He adopts them to Himself saying, "Israel is my son, my firstborn." And again, "Ye shall be my people and I will be your God" (Ex. iv. 22; vi. 7). Thus they witness to the fact not only that Messiah, the healer of the breach, would come, but that, at His coming, He would clear away the insuperable obstacles that prevented guilty man from enjoying free intercourse with his God. It was in the faith that the Messiah would do this when He came, and do it effectually, that God, many hundreds of years before it was done, admitted this people to be near to Himself, pardoned their sins, and gave them the enjoyment of the Divine fellowship. When He did come He not only made an eternal redemption for men in the future, but also "by His death made redemption for the transgressions that were under the first covenant" (Heb. ix. 15).

To make such a covenant, transcendent though the favour was, was but to keep up the same proportion of love, as to give them the Messiah Himself to become one of their number. If He and they are so closely united, the same regard which is felt for Him, must also be extended to them, and so, on that side, we account for this stupendous act of condescension. "They are joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). "God is the lot of their inheritance, &c." (Ps. xvi. 5). The same smiles of the Divine countenance, and the same high proofs of the Divine esteem, which are bestowed on Him, are for His sake shown to those with whom He is practically identified. Also, because they are the people of the Messiah, therefore they belong to the Father, and with Him become children. "All mine are thine."

IV. The history of this people shows the scale on which Messianic blessings should flow.

Of this, in one respect, the history recorded in the Book of Judges is an eminent illustration. Had there been no Messiah and His solemn work, not a paragraph of that history could have been written. But for the regard had to His act of "giving Himself an offering and a sacrifice unto God for a sweet-smelling savour," how could the purity of the Divine administration be maintained, in passing over 400 years of sinning history on the part of the covenant people, while all that was done was simply to give them occasional chastisements? Though more than 1000 years should elapse before the Messiah came, it was the respect had to the vindication of the Divine character which He was certain to make when He did come (Rom. iii. 25, 26), that God forgave the multitudes of transgressions committed by the sinning people. That glorious offering removed the obstacles out of the way. And we see here how far God can go in loving His creatures, when the barriers to the outgoings of His love are removed; how much He can forgive; how long He can forbear; how tenderly He can pity; how freely He can receive back the returning penitent; how close He can come with His fellowship; and how intimately He can ally Himself with guilty men, while yet retaining all His jealousy for the vindication of His spotless holiness, and unimpeachable righteousness.

Three things show the extensive scale on which Divine blessings flow out through the Messiah.

1. *The closeness of the relation to God established through the Messiah.* Far more than a promise is made. An act is done; a step is taken; a new relation is formed. God places Himself in the very closest intimacy with His people. He makes a gift of Himself to His own creatures, all vile and unworthy though they be. *I will be your God!* They are

warranted to claim Him in all the glory of His character, and in all the fulness of His perfections. This is a reach of love, that goes beyond single blessings. It is an inexhaustable storehouse that never can be emptied. All the names of friendship and love are swallowed up in this all-comprehensive phrase—*your God*. The Godhead is pledged to provide all that is needed to constitute a happy and glorious existence. The standard of love is fixed once for all. Can we wonder, if a people with whom such a covenant is made, through the Messiah, is never cast away?

2. *A fountain-head of Divine Promises is opened.* God's favour does not go out in single, isolated blessings, but He proceeds by system. The granting of one blessing pledges His consistency and His faithfulness to give others. These again become an ever augmenting reason for going on with a course of blessing without measure and without end. His own character leads Him to continue to love those whom He once begins to love. It is His manner to "rest in His love." "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." "Mercy is built up for ever." The period for blessing is their whole immortality (Isa. liv. 10). He takes up ground, in granting the gift of the Messiah, from which He cannot draw back Were any different course followed afterwards, it would reflect on His unchangeableness.

3. *The channel being opened, Divine love flows out according to its own natural riches* (Eph. ii. 4, 7; Rom. viii. 32). God's love never needs to be awakened nor stimulated. It never slumbers and never cools. When left to itself it never flickers, but shines forth with noontide strength. "All things are yours"—is its natural tone. "Blessings to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills!" No blessing left ungiven. All that men can hope for on earth, and all they can enjoy through eternity in heaven. The ever full fountain as well as the flowing streams—all are given.

Without going further into the explanation of the Messianic germ, we are now prepared to answer the two important questions which are pertinent to our present purpose, namely, What is the distinctive character of this Book of Judges? and, What is the place which it occupies in the chain of the sacred history? Our reply to the first of these questions is:—

I. It exhibits the God of Providence in His dealings with the Israelitish people as a Messianic people.

It is impossible to read the history of this people as common history. It is clear that they are a sacred people, that they sustain a peculiarly endearing relation to the great Jehovah, that their history is made use of as a medium for revealing the purport and principles of a great scheme beyond themselves, that in it we see the reverse side of the picture of the Messiah's work in redeeming His people out of the hands of their enemies, and that in the whole history we have the shadow of a great substance. It was under the canopy of a gracious covenant that this people were ushered into being. That was the root out of which all that is peculiar in their history springs. Every part of their national life has the presence of that fact in it, and nothing can be wanting in instructiveness which has so sacred a shadow spread over it. It lifts up the whole history to a high tableland of interest peculiar to itself. Nothing is of common or secondary importance. We see God in close contact with this people every moment, watching over them with a peculiarly tender interest. They are never out of His sight. He is ever doing marvellous things on their behalf, and, through His dealings with them, making a glorious display of His Divine Perfections.

This nation personated the people whom the Messiah was to redeem, and exhibited a pattern of the Messianic scheme practically applied. This, indeed, is not directly said. We must look into the organic life of the people to find it out. It was a natural human life that they led, and we are to interpret it according to the laws of right reason. Yet in and through that life, we see Messianic principles constantly illustrated, and Messianic blessings constantly bestowed. God's dealings with that people have no other basis. Their history has no other lines on which to run. That history was to serve the purpose of a pictorial representation. It was really *God in Christ* dealing with His people, though the revelation of the Christ was not yet made. But the whole series of facts and dealings in that nation's life showed there was something great waiting to be revealed. The history served all the purposes of a parable, without ceasing to be true and natural history. Hence, on every page, we see the Messiah's footsteps, though we do not hear His voice, or behold His form. A picture of the great work He was to accomplish is set before us in its manifold details, rather than a description is given in words. No other theory will explain the facts and everywhere New Testament testimony bears it out.

In confirmation of this we specify a few particulars:—

1. *Their covenant God takes the direction of their history into His own hand.* They are not allowed to lead such a life as they themselves might desire—whether to go in this

direction or that, what persons they may associate with, or must avoid, what incidents may happen, what peace and prosperity they may enjoy, or adversity they may suffer, what changes may happen in their career—all this God keeps expressly in His own hand. He chooses the way, appoints the sunshine or the shade, fixes the lot, and in all its parts maps out what the life is to be. Nothing is left to accident, or to the people themselves. Who can doubt that He whose finger in Providence is always pointing out the way will map out their history in harmony with that Messianic design of which His mind is full? The moulder will make the plastic materials in his hands take the shape which he desires for the execution of his plans. Indeed, the entire framework of this history, with all its details, is full of shadows of the Messianic scheme. We may not be able in every instance to say what is typical or not, but that a strong typical vein runs through the whole we have the best warrant to conclude from the fact that the God of the Messianic scheme takes the moulding of the life of this people into His own hands, and this taken in conjunction with the other fact, that He raised up such a people for the very purpose of making them the medium of revealing His Messianic thought.

2. *He chooses them not for any righteousness of their own* (Jud. ii. 15, 16, 18). Their own character is uniformly denounced. They are said to be "stiff-necked," "rebellious," "not obeying God's voice," "provoking God to anger," "forsaking the Lord and serving other gods." The covenant containing the blessings was made with the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who were men of faith. Notwithstanding the repeated and continual violations of the covenant by their descendants, God made no breach of the covenant on His side for the sake of His own great name. This is everywhere asserted as the aim kept in view in bestowing blessings. But that which was really to preserve the honour of His name was what the Messiah should do when he came. By His death, the Christ was "to declare the righteousness of God for the remission of the sins that were past."

3. *He uniformly regards them as a redeemed people.* He always reminds them of the fact never to be forgotten, that he brought them up out of Egypt, which was to them a land of bondage (Jud. ii. 1, 12; vi. 8, 13; x. 11; xix. 30). By reminding them of this fact He means to say, "When I first met with you, you were 'not a people,' but a multitude of slaves, groaning helplessly under intolerable burdens, but I adopted you to become my own people, and delivered you with an outstretched arm from a terrible destruction. I have saved your life, and regard you as redeemed to Myself. Being my own redeemed ones, I will not cast you off" (Ps. xciv. 14). The endearment which this implies is expressed in Ps. xliv. 1–4. The putting this fact in the foreground uniformly is not an accident, but an express design.

4. *From the first they are regarded as an accepted people.* The gift of the land of which they were in possession, was a proof that they were accepted by Jehovah, and this was emphasised by the fact that great and mighty nations were dispossessed through great displays of Divine power, that the accepted people might have it for inheritance. Jehovah did not forget that the blood of sprinkling was upon them (Ex. xxiv. 5-8). By this they were cleansed and made holy unto the Lord, and by this they became a consecrated people, entitled to the privileges of the covenant. All His dealings with them, especially the deliverances He wrought for them, proved that He acknowledged them to be His, notwithstanding their many and grievous transgressions. He raised up all the Judges—it was He whose Spirit rested on the Judges—and it was He who really discomfited all the oppressors.

5. *He takes to Himself the name of the God of Israel.* That is Messianic; for on no other footing than as redeemed and made nigh unto God, through a Mediator, could this name be warrantably used by them (Jud. iv. 6; v. 3, 5; vi. 8, 10, 26; viii. 34; x. 10; xi. 21, 23, &c.)

6. *All their approaches to God were required to be made through a Mediator.* Moses at first was such a Mediator, as the giver of the law, and the constant messenger between God and the people. Aaron was such as high priest. All the priests were so. The Judges were so also, though their work was temporary for the most part. They had no successors in office. In all public approaches made to God there was either some person, place or altar as the centre to which the approach was made (see Jud. ii. 1, 5; iv. 3–7; vii. 7–12, 25–27; xi. 11; xviii. 31; xx. 1–3, 18, 23, 28; xxi. 1, 2, 19). The essential character of Christ is, that He is Mediator for ever. He wears human nature on the throne. "He appears in the presence of God for us" (Heb. viii. 6; ix. 12; x. 19, 20).

7. *A high ideal of religious character and life is set before them.* This is specially marked in the pages of Deuteronomy, where the great Mediator of the old covenant gathers into one view in sublime language the stupendous works of mercy and power God had done for this people, and shows in the most impressive manner how much more is looked for from them than from others, by how much their privileges were greater. Something similar is set forth in Joshua. It is less so in Judges. Yet it is clear everywhere that more is expected of this people than of their neighbours round about them. In ch. ii. it is reckoned a great sin for them to mingle at all with the society of those around them, and severe complaint is made against the incipient forms of idolatry; while no reproof or

correction of any kind is sent to any of the idolatrous nations. They are suffered to walk in their own ways, which in the end bring ruin. Israel is chastened betimes that he may not be condemned with the world when it is too late. In ch. v. high commendation is given to those who offered themselves willingly to fight for the honour of Israel's God, vers. 9, 14, 15—while strong condemnation, if not cursing, is directed against those who kept in the background when there was danger to those who rallied round the standard of Israel's God, vers. 16, 17, 23. Great blessing and honour on the other hand are awarded to those who showed zeal and courage in defending the good cause, vers. 18, 24, &c. All the foremost men of the times, too, are expected to be men of great faith, of self denial, of prayer, of humility, and of courage. And the masses of the people are commended because they gathered in large numbers calling for summary vengeance because in one city of Israel an enormous crime had been committed which was of common occurrence in nearly all the cities of the heathen.

8. *Their remarkable nearness to God, and their full enjoyment of His fellowship.* They saw the forth-puttings of His mighty power against the nations around them, and saw it all done on their behalf. The stars of heaven and the waters of the earth fought against their Siseras and Jabins. Besides, in Mizpeh first, and then in Shiloh, the presence of the ark implied that Jehovah was still among them, and that access to Him was free in the appointed way.

9. *The kind of treatment they received at the Divine hand.* This treatment was so kind and considerate, so tender and patient, so wise and just, so faithful and true, so long-suffering and unchanging. The same thing is seen in their great deliverances, and in the extraordinary interpositions sometimes made on their behalf, also in the rich provision made oftentimes for the supply of their wants, and even in their very chastisements.

10. *The many Judges specially raised up for their deliverance.* These judges, or *shophetim* were really *saviours*, as the word implies, and as it is given in Neh. ix. 27. They were the gifts of Him who watched over this people, and raised them up in special emergencies to save the people from destruction. They were not chosen by the nation, nor did they enter the office by hereditary right. They were men selected by the angel Jehovah, authoritatively commissioned by Him, had His Spirit resting on them to qualify them for their work, received their instructions from Him, and were helped to victory by His presence with them. Who can doubt that they were miniature resemblances of the Messiah to come, seeing it was Messiah's people whom they delivered, and it was the Messiah Himself who sent them?

11. *The several appearances of the Angel of the Lord* (ch. ii. 1, etc.; vi. 11, etc.; xiii. 3, etc.; perhaps v. 23). There can be little doubt that this Angel was really the Messiah Himself, though not yet revealed in proper form, for the proper name is *Angel-Jehovah*, and He personates Jehovah, speaking in His name, claiming His authority, and acting like Him. Through the whole history He appears at different times, showing His sleepless interest in this people, and indicating that He was the real guardian, and actor behind the scenes. Our limits forbid farther expansion. In all this, however, we see God making use of this people's history as a medium dimly to foreshadow His great Messianic purpose.

II. The place which this Book occupies in the chain of the Sacred History.

The entire history of this people consists in the unfolding of the three great promises which God made to Abraham when He called him out of the world that He might establish a church in his family. As detailed in Gen. xii. 1-3, 7, these promises were—(1) To multiply his seed into a nation; (2) To give them a fertile land for a home; (3) To make them the means of blessing all the families of the earth. Hundreds of years passed away, and Abraham himself went down to the grave waiting, but believing and hoping, though not seeing. But God did not forget His word. Slowly, at first, then more quickly, afterwards rapidly, the seed began to increase, to grow and multiply until they seemed to become numerous as the stars, and the land was filled with them. This is recorded in the last part of Genesis, and first part of Exodus, and constitutes the fulfilment of the first promise.

The history proceeds throughout the larger part of Exodus and the whole of Numbers, during which two mighty obstacles have to be overcome in order to the fulfilment of the second promise. The people, though numerous, are in bondage to the greatest power then on earth, and must be set free. That is done by Jehovah expressly in fulfilment of His promise made to Abraham. Also, a waste, barren desert has to be traversed by a whole nation of people on foot, more than one-half consisting of women and children. From all the perils of a forty years' journey through that desert they are next set free, and this brings them to the borders of their promised possession. But another obstacle still interposes. Tall and mighty Anakims are in possession, dwelling in cities walled up to heaven, and having iron chariots and formidable hosts of combatants. These must be

cleared out, and the land left empty ere the true heirs of the inheritance can come in. This also is done by God through the instrumentality of Joshua, but in a manner that only God could do. At the same time, the land, one of the fairest countries under heaven, is formally distributed among all the tribes. This constitutes the fulfilment of the second promise, and is recorded in the Book of Joshua.

But before going farther, something must be done on the people's side. God cannot go on blessing the people till they show themselves worthy of it. Laws and institutions had meantime been given, the observance of which was to be the test of loyalty to their God. God having done as He said, having first increased Abraham's seed as the stars of the sky, and then given them one of the most beautiful homes the earth could furnish, it was time for the people so favoured to be put to the test, as to whether they would be loyal to Him. The Book of Judges records the result of this trial of their character. Hitherto they had not been in circumstances sufficiently favourable for the trial. The period of bondage was not suitable, neither was the wilderness journey; but now, being settled in their lovely home, and a magnificent series of works of Almighty favour to look back upon, to show the fidelity and loving kindness of their covenant-God, they were in the very best position, and under the most encouraging inducements to show their fidelity to Him in return. All that had been done was done for them as a matter of pure favour, and they themselves had solemnly protested they would love, serve and be loyal to their God amid surrounding treason.

Now for the answer. Through the whole Book of Judges the question is put, were they loyal or not? For 400 years the question is put, that the answer may be deliberate, that it may be given by many generations, in case the verdict of one should not be sufficient. Moses and Joshua too are removed, and they are left entirely to themselves that the decision may be all their own. And when the answer comes, it is humiliating. We will not serve the God that brought us up from Egypt, and gave us this land to dwell in. We prefer to serve the gods of the nations round about us, who will allow us to walk after the lusts of our own hearts, and pursue our own ways. The whole Book from the first page to the last is a record of rebellion and apostasy. There is nothing but broken vows, renunciation of allegiance, forgetfulness of obligations, high-handed treason, and hideous crimes. Nothing could be in greater contrast than the infidelity and treachery of the people on the one hand, and the sacred regard paid by their God to His word on the other. If the previous Books are a monument of the uprightness and faithfulness of the Divine character, this Book of Judges is a record of the worthlessness and untrustworthiness of the covenant people, and is full of lessons on self knowledge, humility, and contrition of heart. What a confirmation of the deceitfulness and unteachableness of the human heart! (Jer. xvii., 9.) At its close the cry is, O, for priest or prophet, or king—anything rather than leave the people to themselves.

Hence the connection of this book with those that follow in the series; but had this book been a-wanting, a most important proof would have been left out, of the necessity of the future arrangements which God made for the guidance of His people in their onward history. Above all, a broad foundation is laid for the everlasting song of praise to redeeming grace.

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"	238,	"	9,	"	"Kedish"	"	"Kedesh."
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